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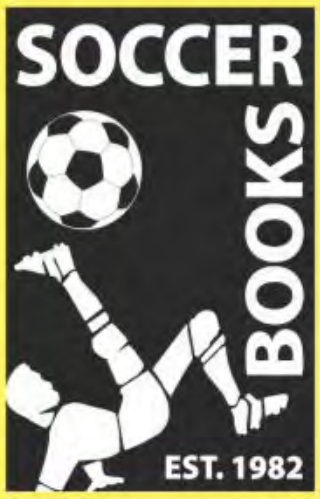

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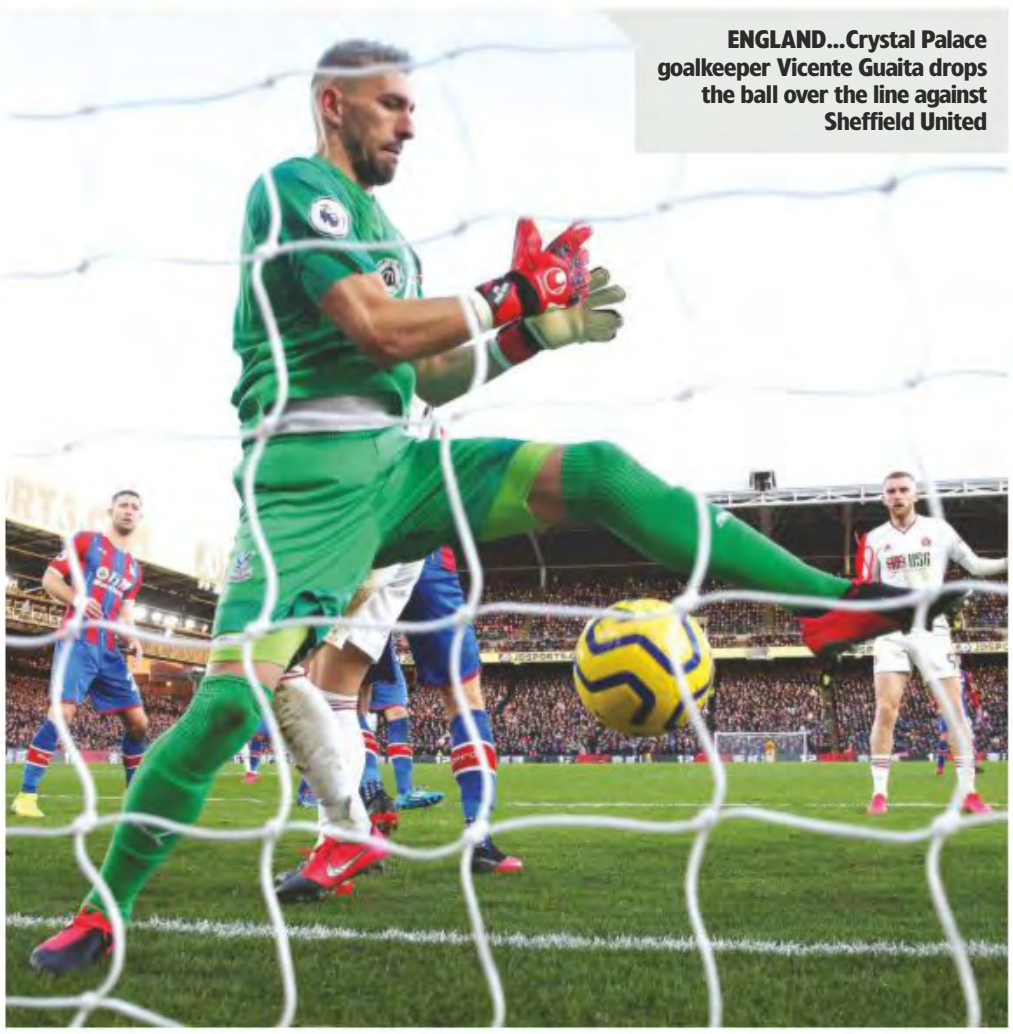
SOUTH AFRICA...Orlando Pirates forward Kabelo Dlamini gets in a tangle with Bidvest Wits midfielder Elias Pelembe

BELGIUM... Anderlecht's Derrick Luckassen (right) competes with Emmanuel Dennis of Club Brugge



ENGLAND...Crystal Palace goalkeeper Vicente Guaita drops the ball over the line against Sheffield United

FRANCE...fans of Nantes and Bordeaux pay tribute to late Nantes forward Emiliano Sala on the anniversary of his death

MEXICO...Queretaro's Ariel Nahuelpan celebrates after scoring against Monterrey

CHILE...Riot police disperse Universidad de Chile supporters after they set a fire in the stands during the Copa Libertadores match against Brazil's Internacional

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FROM THE EDITOR

For many years in England, football consumers have been fed the narrative that the Premier League is the best competition in the world. That argument may help to sell newspapers and TV subscriptions but it does not tell the whole story. The theme of "life outside the Premier League" has been a familiar one to *World Soccer* readers over the years and we continue with it this month.

We turn the spotlight on two players who are thriving after leaving Manchester United last summer. We speak to Chris Smalling (page 46) about the good, bad and occasionally ugly aspects of his new life in Serie A; and we profile Romelu Lukaku (page 34), a player who has defied the critics throughout his career and is doing so again this season at Internazionale.

> The theme of "life outside the Premier League" has been a familiar one to *World Soccer* readers over the years

Another former United player, Javier Hernandez, is expected to thrive in the new season of MLS (page 60) a league that is increasingly looking to hire Latino players from Mexico and South America, rather than England and Europe. Europe remains the main destination for stars of the South American Under-23 Championship (page 54), but the sands are shifting.

Gavin Hamilton, Editor

10 SIGNIFICANT EVENTS THIS MONTH

1 Javier Hernandez joins LA Galaxy p29
2 Infantino proposes changes to crisis-hit CAF p30
3 United sign Fernandes in January's biggest deal p13
4 Holland star Rob Rensenbrink dies p19
5 Lionel Messi attacks Barcelona director Abidal p26
6 Brazil and Argentina qualify for Olympics p54
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8 Chinese football in lockdown p72
9 Ecuador gamble on Jordi Cruyff p70
10 Klinsmann walks out on Hertha Berlin p28

London-bound... Hakim Ziyech

AFRICA

Audit reveals financial chaos at CAF

The Confederation of African Football is in a state of disarray, according to an audit by a leading accountancy firm.

The investigation, carried out by PricewaterhouseCoopers, found that the organisation's accounting was "unreliable and not trustworthy", and that some 35 of 40 large payments, totalling $8.3million, were "unusual" or had "little or no supporting documentation".

CAF's presidential office was found to be "directly involved" in the controversial decision to employ French company Tactical Steel, a little-known manufacturer of gym equipment, as a key supplier of sportswear for its competitions.

The audit also questioned "the role played" by

"She could and should be a multi-millionaire, but she never asked for a penny more than her team-mates. She's always put her team, her country first"

John Herdman on record-breaking Canadian international Christine Sinclair

ENGLAND

Chelsea agree deal with Ajax for Ziyech

Chelsea have agreed a £37.6million deal with Ajax to sign Moroccan winger Hakim Ziyech in the summer.

Chelsea's two-window transfer ban for breaching the rules on the signing of young players was reduced on appeal, allowing them to sign players in the January window. However, the London club opted against bringing in any new players.

Ziyech will be Frank Lampard's first signing as Chelsea boss. He was one of the stars of the Ajax side that reached last year's Champions League semi-finals. His departure from Amsterdam will follow last year's transfers of Frenkie De Jong to Barcelona and Matthijs De Ligt to Juventus.

CAF president Ahmad and his attache, Loic Gerand, in the deal with Tactical Steel. The company's financial dealings with CAF were described as "highly suspicious".

Ahmad has strenuously denied any wrongdoing. FIFA president Gianni Infantino has proposed a series of reforms to African football (see page 30).

Suspicious ...Ahmad

HEROES & VILLAINS

Amazing...world-record holder Christine Sinclair

CHRISTINE SINCLAIR

The Canadian set a new world record for either men or women when her two goals in an 11-0 victory over St Kitts & Nevis took her past Abby Wambach's previous best and on to 185. The 36-year-old was described as "an amazing human being" by former national coach John Herdman.

ERLING HAALAND

The Norwegian became the first substitute to score a hat-trick on his Bundesliga debut. The 19-year-old achieved the feat in Borussia Dortmund's win against Augsburg.

THE MALDINIS

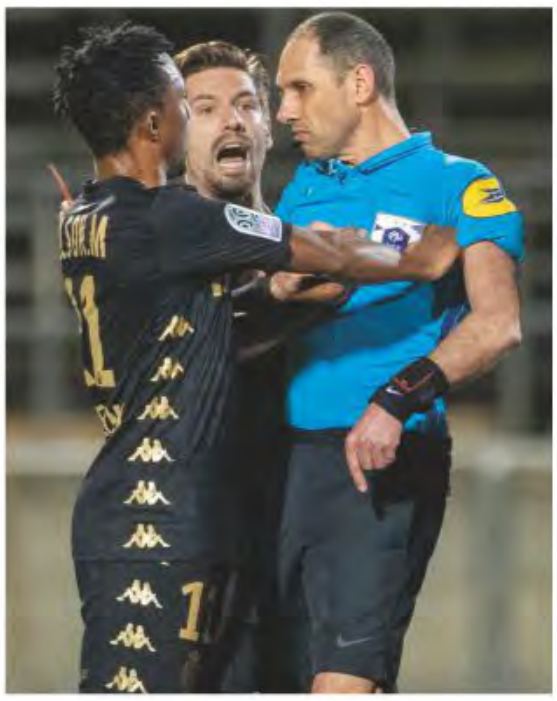
When Daniel Maldini lined up against Verona in Serie A he became the third generation of his family to represent Milan, following in the footsteps of his grandfather Cesare and his dad Paolo. The 18-year-old's debut left the trio just five short of 1,000 collective appearances for the club.

Family affair... Daniel Maldini

SOULEYMANE CAMARA

The Senegalese forward set a new club record when he made his 430th appearance for Montpellier as a substitute in a 5-0 win over Caen in the French Cup.

Ban...Gelson Martins pushes referee Mikael Lesage



GELSON MARTINS

The Monaco winger was suspended indefinitely and faces a lengthy ban after he pushed referee Mikael Lesage twice, before and after being sent off during Monaco's 3-1 Ligue 1 defeat at Nimes.

MARIO BALOTELLI

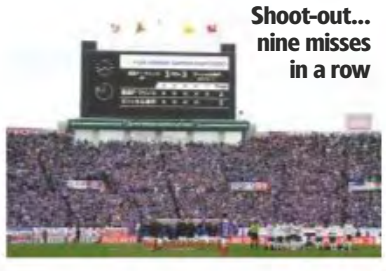
His red card in Brescia's 2-2 draw at home to Cagliari in Serie A was the 13th of his career and made him only the second player in Europe's top five leagues to have been dismissed in each of the past four seasons, along with Monaco defender Jemerson.

MARTIN ODEGAARD

The Real Sociedad loanee scored the first goal against his parent club Real Madrid in a shock 4-3 Copa del Rey quarter-final upset at the Bernabeu Stadium.

VISSEL KOBE & KASHIMA ANTLERS

A crazy finish to the Japanese Super Cup saw players from both teams miss nine penalties in a row between them. After the first four penalties were converted, Hotaru Yamaguchi eventually secured victory for Vissel Kobe with the 14th kick of the shoot-out.



Shoot-out... nine misses in a row

"Imagine, he's 'the King', he was always such an imposing figure and today he can't walk properly"

Pele's son Edinho says his 79-year-old father (left) is now reluctant to be seen in public

Giovanni REYNA

(Borussia Dortmund)

Erling Haaland may have got eight goals in his first four competitive games, but is not the only teenager to have recently announced himself at Dortmund. Gio Reyna scored a wonder goal in a 3-2 loss at Werder Bremen in the cup.

Like Haaland, the 17-year-old American creative midfielder is from good footballing stock. While the Norwegian's father Alf-Inge played for Leeds United and Manchester City, Giovanni's dad is USA Hall of Fame playmaker Claudio Reyna.

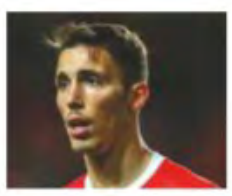
Giovanni joined Dortmund last summer from New York City FC and has only been a member of the German club's senior squad since the turn of year but Dortmund coach Lucien Favre is certainly a huge fan.

Not normally one to heap excessive praise on a young player, Favre says: "You'd have to be blind not to spot his footballing talent."

ALEX GRIMALDO
(Benfica)
Ex-Barca trainee who has been in fine form for the Portuguese league leaders.

FRANCISCO TINCAO
(Barcelona)
Started just seven games for Braga this season when Barcelona agreed to pay €31m for the Portuguese Under-21 forward who will join in the summer.

TINO KADEWERE
(Lyon)
The 24-year-old Zimbabwe international striker was signed by Lyon for €12m.



ALPHONSO DAVIES
(Bayern Munich)
A revelation as an emergency left-back who has boosted his club's title bid.

JOSE BORDALAS
(Getafe)
The 55-year-old coach continues to works miracles at the unfashionable club from Madrid's suburbs.

CHRISTIAN KOUAME
(Fiorentina)
The Ivory Coast international will join Fiorentina from Genoa for €15m in the summer despite being out injured.

"That's the reason you bought me"

After a second-half hat-trick on his debut for Dortmund after appearing as a sub, Erling Haaland reports back to sporting director Michael Zorc

MOST EXPENSIVE DEALS IN **JANUARY TRANSFER WINDOW**

€55m	**Bruno Fernandes**	*(Sporting CP, Por, to Manchester United, Eng)*
€35m	**Dejan Kulusevski**	*(Atalanta, Ita, to Juventus, Ita)*
€32m	**Giovani Lo Celso**	*(Real Betis, Spa, to Tottenham Hotspur, Eng)*
€30m	**Steven Bergwijn**	*(PSV, Hol, to Tottenham Hotspur, Eng)*
€30m	**Reinier**	*(Flamengo, Bra, to Real Madrid, Spa)*
€27m	**Krzysztof Piatek**	*(Milan, Ita, to Hertha Berlin, Ger)*
€26m	**Sander Berge**	*(Genk, Blg, to Sheffield United, Eng)*
€25m	**Lucas Tousart**	*(Lyon, Fra, to Hertha Berlin, Ger)*
€23m	**Paco Alcacer**	*(Borussia Dortmund, Ger, to Villarreal, Spa)*
€21.3m	**Jarrod Bowen**	*(Hull City, Eng, to West Ham United, Eng)*
€20m	**Sofyan Amrabat**	*(Verona, Ita, to Fiorentina, Ita)*
€20m	**Raul De Tomas**	*(Benfica, Por, to Espanyol, Spa)*
€20m	**Youssef En-Nesyri**	*(Leganes, Spa, to Sevilla, Spa)*
€20m	**Christian Eriksen**	*(Tottenham Hotspur, Eng, to Internazionale, Ita)*
€20m	**Bruno Guimaraes**	*(Athletico Paranaense, Bra, to Lyon, Fra)*
€20m	**Erling Haaland**	*(Red Bull Salzburg, Aut, to B Dortmund, Ger)*
€20m	**Stanislav Lobotka**	*(Celta Vigo, Spa, to Napoli, Ita)*
€20m	**Dani Olmo**	*(Dinamo Zagreb, Cro, to RB Leipzig, Ger)*
€20m	**Julian Weigl**	*(Borussia Dortmund, Ger, to Benfica, Por)*
€19.6m	**Daniel Podence**	*(Olympiakos, Gre, to Wolverhampton W, Eng)*
€18m	**Edmond Tapsoba**	*(Vitoria Guimaraes, Por, to B Leverkusen, Ger)*
€17.5m	**Aurelien Tchouameni**	*(Bordeaux, Fra, to Monaco, Fra)*
€17.45m	**Gabriel Barbosa**	*(Internazionale, Ita, to Flamengo, Bra)*
€17m	**Exequiel Palacios**	*(River Plate, Arg, to Bayer Leverkusen, Ger)*
€17m	**Andrea Petagna**	*(SPAL, Ita, to Napoli, Ita)*
€15m	**Matheus Cunha**	*(RB Leipzig, Ger, to Hertha Berlin, Ger)*
€15m	**Alfred Duncan**	*(Sassuolo, Ita, to Fiorentina, Ita)*
€15m	**Youssouf Fofana**	*(Strasbourg, Fra, to Monaco, Fra)*
€14m	**Amir Rrahmani**	*(Verona, Ita, to Napoli, Ita)*
€12m	**Munas Dabbur**	*(Sevialla Spa, to Hoffenheim, Ger)*
€12m	**Diego Demme**	*(RB Leipzig, Ger, to Napoli, Ita)*
€12m	**Tino Kadewere**	*(Le Havre, Fra, to Lyon, Fra)*
€12m	**Jeison Murillo**	*(Valencia, Spa, to Sampdoria, Ita)*
€12m	**Duvan Zapata**	*(Sampdoria, Ita, to Atalanta, Ita)*
€11.8m	**Ivan Cavaleiro**	*(Wolverhampton W, Eng, to Fulham, Eng)*
€11.2m	**Noah Okafor**	*(Basle, Swi, to Red Bull Salzburg, Aut)*
€11m	**Santiago Ascacibar**	*(Stuttgart, Ger, to Hertha Berlin, Ger)*
€10.5m	**Mbwana Samatta**	*(Genk, Blg, to Aston Villa, Eng)*
€10m	**Josh Brownhill**	*(Bristol City, Eng, to Burnley, Eng)*
€10m	**Adrian Embarba**	*(Rayo Vallecano, Spa, to Espanyol, Spa)*
€10m	**Jean Marcelin**	*(Auxerre, Fra, to Monaco, Fra)*
€10m	**Remi Oudin**	*(Reims, Fra, to Bordeaux, Fra)*
€10m	**Strahinja Pavlovic**	*(Partizan Belgrade, Ser, to Monaco, Fra)*
€10m	**Marin Pongracic**	*(Red Bull Salzburg, Aut, to Wolfsburg, Ger)*

Biggest deal...Bruno Fernandes

Napoli move... Stanislav Lobotka

Spur...Steven Bergwijn

Keir RADNEDGE

THE INSIDER

Brexit evolution, not revolution

As the UK awoke on the morning of Saturday, February 1, apparently nothing had changed. The trains ran; cars, buses and lorries converged in the usual traffic jams; planes took off and landed.

Britain had not fallen off the edge of Europe into the Atlantic Ocean. Brexit had happened and the transitional countdown was inexorably under way.

As for daily life, so also for sport in general – and football in particular.

This prospect has, over the past three years since the referendum, fascinated many directors and officials in other major western European countries and their leagues. They consider Brexit a massive own goal for the Premier League and believe they can cream off a slice of the TV and sponsorship action. Along the way they would keep their own star players at home and strike back at English clubs in the Champions and Europa Leagues.

The vultures, however, are likely to be disappointed.

One certain point for British international football is Brexit is irrelevant. That means not only for England but also Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, the four regions of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Only half the 55-strong membership of UEFA are European Union countries, so the status of the British home nations is no different to those.

The same goes for the clubs. World Cup, European Championship, Nations League, Champions League, Europa League? No change.

But the effect on the domestic game is far more complex.

The four major players are the government (national strategy), the Football Association (governing all English football), the Premier League (most high-profile operation of its kind in the world) and the Football League (the three lower professional divisions). Between them they must devise regulations to cope with legislation.

> After this year every foreign footballer will need a work permit, the precise terms of which have yet to be agreed

Until now, free movement of labour within the European Union has opened the UK football market to anyone holding an EU passport. This also benefited players from Africa and South America who acquired EU citizenship through residency elsewhere or family roots. It also included so-called "Kolpak" citizens from countries adhering to an EU Association Agreement which grants the same right to freedom of work and movement.

But after this year every foreign footballer will need a work permit, the precise terms of which have yet to be agreed.

Until now, work permits have been granted to non-EU players who have appeared in a minimum percentage of their country's competitive games over the previous two years. The number of matches varies according to the country's place in the FIFA rankings, with adjustments for age, injury and suspension.

If a player fails these criteria then exceptions can be made on the basis of assessment as a special talent.

Immigration was a key factor in the Brexit vote. Boris Johnson wants to shut out low-wage, unskilled immigrants, so government ministers have proposed a minimum annual pay rate of £30,000 for a work permit.

That will not bother football. Premier League players earn an average of £3million a year; Football League players earn much less but still way above the notional minimum. Premier clubs target established, outstanding foreign players and will continue to do so.

However, while the Premier League wants to maintain the status quo, so the FA sees Brexit as an opportunity to enforce greater opportunities for young English players.

The plight of Phil Foden is a perfect example of the FA's concern: a gifted member of England's under-17 world champions in 2017 yet still only a bit-part player at Manchester City. A talent going to waste.

Foden's plight explains why such as Jadon Sancho headed to Borussia Dortmund in Germany for the chance to play regular first-team football.

While the Premier League wants work permits to be granted virtually automatically, the FA wants to see the number of home-grown players in a 25-man squad raised from eight to 12.

They will meet somewhere in the middle. Maybe 10 by 2022 and a promise of further negotiations about an increase to 12 by 2025. Who knows? This is, after all, Brexit under discussion in which the only certainty is uncertainty.

The one English football sector which may have to rethink its model is the Football League, and the clubs in the third and fourth tiers in particular, .

The market of low-level, free-market

Limited opportunities ...Phil Foden

EU players will dry up. Also, from next year English clubs will not be able to sign foreign players that are aged 16 and 17 as FIFA rules stipulate they must be 18.

The strongest card held by club owners is the knowledge, shared by the government and the FA, that the Premier League is one of the country's most popular worldwide exports.

It does not compare in value to the military, finance or gambling industries, but it is one of the UK's best-known international brands. Self-protection is in everyone's interests; more so now than ever. Which is bad news for the vultures across the English Channel.

Indeed, not only may the Premier League maintain its primacy, it could become even richer if the easing of investment controls make it easier for Arab, Chinese and American operators to throw ever more zillions of pounds and dollars at the English game...and pay ever more astronomical transfer fees and wages. WS

Breaking through the dark clouds of history

When Real Madrid beat Eintracht Frankfurt 7-3 in the 1960 European Cup Final, the German club's president was Rudolf Gramlich. He had played for the club in the 1930s and been capped 22 times by the national side.

Nazi...Rudolf Gramlich

What went unreported was the fact that he had been an active member of the Nazi party and the notorious SS. A full admission had to wait until January this year, on the eve of the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz death camp.

Frankfurt's current supremo, Peter Fischer, set out Gramlich's grisly past as the club stripped him, posthumously, of the title of honorary president.

But how many more Gramlichs were rehabilitated through their post-war efforts to construct a newly democratised West Germany from Hitler's wreckage? No one knows and, for a long time, no one cared to look. It was too awkward, too painful.

When the DFB published a centenary history in 2000 which glossed over the 1930s, the outcry prompted it to commission a study by university lecturer Nils Havermann, whose *Fussball underm Hakenkreuz* (Football Under the Swastika) was the first of a series of studies delving deeper and deeper into the mire.

Havermann's work did not escape criticism for telling the "who, what and when" of Nazi infiltration and control but not the "why"; the reasoning and morality, or lack of it.

During the Nazi era, a policeman, Felix Linnemann was president of the DFB, from 1925 until 1945. According now to the DFB: "[Linnemann] as head of the Hanover Criminal Police Control Centre, was directly involved in the rounding up of Sinti and Roma, which was the preliminary stage for their deportation to Auschwitz.

"Several hundred people, due to an instruction signed by Linnemann, were deported to the extermination camp and killed there."

A leading referee in the inter-war years, Peter "Peco" Bauwens was second in significance after Linemann. He joined the Nazi Party in 1933 but was later expelled because his wife was Jewish.

Bauwens tried to engineer a German takeover of FIFA. He was a friend of its German general-secretary, Ivo Schricker, but their relationship cooled after Schricker rebuffed Bauwens' proposals to increase Germany's places on the executive committee and in voting power.

After the war Bauwens became president of the recreated DFB and survived controversy over what was labelled a "Sieg Heil speech" at a dinner to celebrate the 1954 World Cup victory. He retired in 1960 and that may have been the point at which German football decided to draw a line under the past.

That line may have held but it could not hold for ever. WS

WINNERS

BELFORT
The team from the fourth-tier of French football knocked high-flying Montpellier out of the Coupe de France in a penalty shoot-out.

SOUTH KOREA UNDER-23s
Scored injury-time winners in games against China, Jordan and Saudi Arabia to win the AFC Under-23 Championship and confirm their place in the Men's Olympic Games Football Tournament later this year in Tokyo.

LIVERPOOL
The European champions' 2-0 win at West Ham United meant Jurgen Klopp's side had beaten every top-flight opponent in a campaign for the first time.

ATLETICO MADRID
Diego Simeone's team were knocked out of the Copa del Rey by third-tier Segunda B club Cultural Leonesa.

BRENDAN RODGERS
The Leicester City manager had won 31 domestic cup ties on the trot going into the semi-finals of the League Cup but saw his team succumb to a late winner from Aston Villa's Trezeguet.

TORINO
The Turin club suffered their heaviest home defeat in a 7-0 loss to Atalanta. It was also Atalanta's biggest victory in Serie A.

LOSERS

Jonathan WILSON

TECHNICALLY SPEAKING

Have we reached peak pressing point?

When Spain were at their peak the fear was occasionally expressed, particularly among British critics, that if teams could retain possession so well then football was in danger of taking on the dynamic of basketball. One team would have an attack, then the other would have an attack, and so on and so on, rather than the physical and tactical midfield battles that seemed so essential to the sport.

A decade on, that seems a remarkable concern to have had.

It is true that roughly one in six Premier League games features a split of possession that is greater than 70-30 – which doesn't necessarily make for an enthralling spectacle – but the sport that football can most resemble in this case is handball, with the attacking team passing constantly around the defensive line, hoping to provoke a space that can be exploited.

At elite level, sport is now primarily about transitions, which makes sense. When one team finds a successful way to play, that mode is popularised, and then another team finds a way to combat it. A possession-driven style is therefore combatted by working out ways of interrupting the flow of passes, pressing hard, breaking patterns, winning the ball back and counter-attacking quickly. This is why pressing, in its various forms, has come to dominate at the highest level of the game and why those managers who are reluctant to press high, most notably Jose Mourinho, have come to feel slightly old-fashioned.

Such matters are rarely clear cut and modern football, interlocked as it is across so many countries, is a complex network of competing impulses. However, the symbolic moment when it became apparent that the dominance of the Pep Guardiola-mode of possession football was at an end came in a Champions League semi-final in 2014, when his Bayern Munich side were eviscerated on the break by Carlo Ancelotti's Real Madrid.

This wasn't an opponent sitting deep and absorbing the punches; it was a 4-0 hammering. And that it was led by a graduate of Arrigo Sacchi's Milan was appropriate – even if Ancelotti has tended to be an easy-going pragmatist rather than the sort of driven obsessive who could have imposed a hard press as a consistent policy.

What was particularly striking was how Madrid themselves, then under Mourinho, had been hammered in the semi-finals the previous season, beaten 4-1 in the first leg by the ferocious press of Borussia Dortmund. That evolution raises questions about where Barcelona will go next, given their appointment of coach Quique Setien, who appears an adherent to the old school of radical possession football.

Pressing matters ...Jurgen Klopp (left) and Ralph Hasenhuttl

> At elite level, sport is now primarily about transitions

The end...Sergio Ramos celebrates scoring for Real Madrid against Bayern Munich in 2014

That Dortmund side were, of course, led by Jurgen Klopp, and that semi-final was the first concrete sign that the German school of pressing might have a significant influence outside the Bundesliga.

But Germany's attitude to pressing was always a little odd.

When Bayern won three European Cups in a row, between 1974 and 1976, it was widely seen as being a continuation of the "Total Football" tradition. That was true in the sense that they prioritised possession and the manipulation of position on the field, but they eschewed the hard press of Ajax.

Pressing in Germany was for a long time an outsider pursuit, making its first impact in the late 1980s as Helmut Gross, a structural engineer who had essentially taught himself tactical theory, and Ralf Rangnick, who had been fascinated by pressing since the lower-league side of which he was player-coach played Valeriy Lobanovskyi's Dynamo Kiev in a friendly, took up roles at Stuttgart.

Volker Finke, who had never played football at the highest level, had notable success with a pressing game while coach at Freiburg, leading them

to third place in the Bundesliga in 1995, but their financial status meant they couldn't sustain that position, and as they fell back it allowed a complacent establishment to believe football was still about the traditional values of leadership and winning individual battles.

Change, though, was coming, and pressing reached its peak in Klopp, who was introduced to the concept by Wolfgang Frank at Mainz.

Frank had been a forward for Eintracht Braunschweig but he was one of a growing band of German coaches obsessed by Sacchi. When Frank was appointed, Mainz were bottom of the German second tier with one point and no goals in eight games. They stayed up that season, though, and the following year finished fourth.

Once pressing had been accepted, Germany took to it with a convert's zeal. Rangnick had been broadly dismissed as an over-intellectualising crank when he had appeared on German television in the late 1990s to explain the concept of zonal marking that underpins most pressing, but Klopp's punditry on the 2006 World Cup made such ideas mainstream. The Bundesliga now feels like the world centre of pressing, both through coaches still working in Germany – Julian Nagelsmann, Marco Rose and Lucien Favre – and those who have left, particularly for England – Klopp, Ralph Hasenhuttl, Daniel Farke, David Wagner.

Not that the return to an aggressive, percussive game has been universally welcomed in the game.

"We have progressively taken the NBA route, that of a very 'athleticised' sport," Arsene Wenger said recently. "Today, like basketball, certain creative players are being eliminated, under the simple pretext that they are not athletic enough.

"In time, the danger, for me, is that football develops into a sport where players run like crazy people to win the ball back as quickly as possible, but who don't know what to do when they actually have it in their possession."

That he should invoke the basketball comparison in precisely the opposite way to how it was used a decade ago, perhaps, is revealing. Football follows a path until it reaches an extreme at which it begins to resemble something that is not football, at which point an antithetical reaction drives it back. That's how dialectical development works. WS

REPORTS WE COULDN'T MAKE UP

Double...Antoine Griezmann (right)

1 GRIEZMANN SPOILS THE IBIZA PARTY

The party island of Ibiza made the most of its team UD Ibiza's first-ever competitive match against Barcelona. The two sides were drawn together in the Copa del Rey, the first season that UD Ibiza had entered the competition.

The club, only formed in 2015, hired one of the island's top DJs, Manu Gonzalez, to "provide the pre-match and half-time beats", and it nearly inspired an almighty shock as the islanders took a ninth-minute lead through Javi Perez.

They held on until the 72nd minute, when Antoine Griezmann equalised for the Spanish champions. He then added a second, deep into added time, to break Ibiza hearts.

2 WHO YA GONNA CALL?

The unlikely appointment of English management duo Alan Pardew and Chris Powell was greeted at their first game in charge of Eredivisie strugglers Den Haag with a giant Ghostbusters banner in the home fans' end.

The word "*degradatiespook*" was visible across the banner which when translated means "'relegation ghost" and the local supporters clearly hope that the pair can inspire their team to avoid the drop.

Pardew and Powell began well with a 2-0 win over RKC Waalwijk but a 4-0 loss at Utrecht and a home draw with Vitesse left them three points adrift of the play-off spot.

3 DE ROSSI IS MADE UP TO WATCH ROMA

Former Roma captain Daniele De Rossi, who announced his playing retirement in January, wore a disguise of fake nose and glasses in order to watch the recent derby game against Lazio from the Curva Sud section of the Stadio Olimpico.

Born and raised in the city's working-class suburb of Ostia, when he left his home-town club last year the midfielder said he would find a way to return and watch his old team "with a beer and a sandwich to cheer on my friends".

The 36-year-old's wife, Sarah Felberbaum, revealed De Rossi's make-up job on Instagram, explaining: "We lost an entire afternoon, hours of make-up and traumatised children, but he was happy like a little kid."

4 CUP PRANK PAYS OFF FOR JASON

Shrewsbury Town of the third tier in English football welcomed the Sky Sports cameras down to their training ground ahead of their FA Cup fourth round tie at home to Champions League winners and Premier League champions-elect Liverpool.

And forward Jason Cummings thought it would be fun to strip down to his underpants and play the clown while team-mate David Edwards was being interviewed.

Four days later, however, Cummings was the hero as he scored twice in the second-half to earn the Shrews a money-spinning replay at Anfield.

Attention seekers ...Jason Cummings (right) and Den Haag fans (below)

"Whoever has the ball is more likely to make a mistake"

Jose Mourinho revels in his safety-first approach after Tottenham Hotspur beat Manchester City 2-0

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

IN

Relegation fight ...Uwe Rosler

EUROPE

Bottom of the Bundesliga, Fortuna Dusseldorf replaced coach Friedhelm Funkel with **UWE ROSLER**.

MORENO LONGO agreed to take charge of Torino after they parted company with Walter Mazzarri following 7-0 and 4-0 defeats to Atalanta and Lecce in Serie A. Brescia sacked Eugenio Corini for the second time this season and appointed **DIEGO LOPEZ** as coach.

SERGEN YALCIN left Yeni Malatyaspor and replaced Abdullah Avci as coach of Besiktas following their Turkish Cup loss to second-tier Erzurumspor.

AFRICA

Croatian **BRANKO IVANKOVIC** was named coach of Oman, replacing Dutchman Erwin Koeman who was relieved of his position after December's Gulf Cup.

New start... Sergen Yalcin

Ghana named **CHARLES AKONNOR** as coach in place of Kwesi Appiah, while **MILUTIN "MICHO" SREDOJEVIC** was appointed as coach of Zambia.

Croatian **ZDRAVKO LOGARUSIC** was appointed coach of Zimbabwe after leaving Sudan, where he was replaced by Frenchman **HUBERT VELUD**.

DOMINIC KUNENE took over from Kosta Papic in charge of Eswatini (previously known as Swaziland).

Moroccan champions Wydad appointed Frenchman **SEBASTIEN DESABRE** as coach.

Former Nigeria star **EMMANUEL AMUNEKE** took charge of Egyptian Premier League strugglers El Makkasa.

ASIA

DRAGAN SKOCIC relinquished his post in charge of Iran Pro League side Sanat Naft to replace Marc Wilmots as the country's national coach.

A-League side Newcastle Jets appointed Welshman **CARL ROBINSON** as head coach after parting company with Ernie Merrick in January.

WALID REGRAGUI left Moroccan side FUS Rabat and replaced Rui Faria at Qatar Stars League leaders Al Duhail.

National job ...Jose Peseiro

Peseiro takes charge of Venezuela

Portuguese coach **JOSE PESEIRO** was appointed national coach of Venezuela following the exit of Rafael Dudamel in January after nearly four years in charge.

The former Sporting CP, Porto and Braga boss, who also led Saudi Arabia in their unsuccessful bid to qualify for the 2010 World Cup in South Africa, was handed the job after Argentinian coach Jorge Sampaoli, who was most recently in charge of Brazilian side Santos, turned down the post.

Appointments, sackings & loans

OUT

Gone...Markus Babbel

EUROPE

The only man to cross the Old Firm divide twice, Scotland striker **KENNY MILLER** retired at the age of 40. As well as spells with Rangers (three times) and Celtic, he played in the Premier League, Turkey and MLS, and was capped 69 times for his country, before finishing his career this season with Partick Thistle.

ASIA

German coach **MARKUS BABBEL** was dismissed by A-League side Western Sydney Wanderers.

"It will stay with me until my dying day"

Rob Rensenbrink on his missed chance in the 1978 World Cup Final

OBITUARIES

So close...the post denied Rensenbrink in 1978

ROB RENSENBRINK

(1947-2020)

Although he got 14 goals in 46 games for Holland, Rensenbrink will always be remembered for the one he didn't score.

After 89 minutes against Argentina in the 1978 World Cup Final, and with the score at 1-1, Holland's Rudi Krol lofted a long ball down field. His only thought was to clear the lines with extra-time in sight.

As the host nation's defence hesitated, Rensenbrink accelerated in from the left and toe-poked the ball past the South American keeper. But his shot struck a post and ricocheted away. Argentina had survived and went on to win 3-1 in the extra half hour.

"In the Netherlands now people only know me from that shot against the post," the Dutchman would later say. "That made me a national celebrity...that post will stay with me to my dying day."

An Amsterdammer, though one who never played for Ajax, at 21 he turned professional with DWS who, though now an amateur club in the sixth tier of Dutch football, had been domestic champions in 1964 and European Cup quarter-finalists a year later.

Rejecting an offer from Ajax that he says "was a joke", Rensenbrink crossed the border and won the Belgian Cup with Club Brugge. Two years later he moved to Anderlecht, and although some critics grumbled that he used to save himself for the big occasion – when, as even coach Raymond Goethals conceded, he "put on his tuxedo" – it was a winning style and he was the star of a team that twice won the European Cup-winners Cup and the UEFA Super Cup, as well as two Belgian league titles and four cups.

In 1976 he became only the second Dutch player, after Johan Boskamp, to be voted Belgium's footballer of the year.

In 1974 a muscle strain sustained on the eve of the World Cup Final against hosts West Germany meant he had to be substituted at half-time, but four years later Holland were among the favourites for the finals in Argentina – even after Johan Cruyff had announced his decision to stay at home.

Rensenbrink made the perfect start in 1978, scoring a hat-trick in a 3-0 dismissal of Iran. Next came a 0-0 draw with Peru before he struck the opening goal in a 3-2 defeat by Scotland in Mendoza as the Dutch went through on goal difference.

In the second round group he scored a penalty in the 5-1 thrashing of Austria, before a 2-2 draw with West Germany and a 2-1 win over Italy took him and his team-mates through to the Final in Buenos Aires.

"I went back 25 years later, with Johan Neeskens, for TV, and we stood by that post," he recalled. "But do you know what? Despite that moment I had much better feelings about 1978 than 1974. Then everything revolved around Cruyff. He often moved to the left so then I had to switch into the centre. In 1978 I played much better. I was allowed to take the penalties and scored five goals.

"Of course, how the Final finished was a shame. That post. Always that post..."

Real Madrid and Internazionale came calling but Anderlecht refused to sell, and he eventually wound down his career with Portland Timbers in the original North American Soccer League before an injury-wrecked spell in the French second division with Toulouse.

Rensenbrink returned to a quiet life in his old home town of Oostzaan. In 2012 he was diagnosed with degenerative muscle disease and died at home surrounded by his family.

Keir Radnedge

BOBBY BROWN

(1923-2020)

Former Rangers and Scotland keeper who made 296 appearances in 10 years at Ibrox, winning eight trophies, including an unprecedented domestic treble in 1948. A school teacher, he was the last amateur to play for his country and was capped five times before becoming their first full-time manager in 1967 and overseeing a 3-2 win at Wembley against then-world champions England that April.

LEON MOKUNA

(1928-2020)

The first player from DR Congo to play in Europe, he was spotted by Sporting CP when touring Africa and scored 19 goals in 11 games in his first season with the Portuguese side. After returning home to play for AS Vita Club he joined Gent in 1957, later playing for Waregem and Kortrijk, and twice representing Belgium's B side. He coached the then Congo-Leopoldville national side at the 1965 Africa Cup of Nations finals.

HANS KRAMER

(1929-2019)

Goalkeeper for the Hanover team that shocked German football by thrashing star-studded Kaiserslautern 5-1 in the championship play-off in 1954. A part-timer like all of his Hanover team-mates at the time, he was a worker at the local tyre factory. Although he was not capped by his country, he did appear in two European club competitions: playing for Hanover against Roma in the Inter-City Fairs Cup and with Hamburg in the Champions Cup.

eye witness

Steve Menary reports

TUNISIA

Esperance chase special treble

When Adem Taous pulls down an Esperance attacker to concede a penalty and then boots the ball into the stand in protest, one yellow card follows another and the Club Africain defender trudges off to a shower of water bottles and derision.

There is no support for Taous as one of Africa's biggest derbies has been neutered since the revolution that convulsed Tunisia in 2011 and unleashed the Arab Spring.

With the exception of the 2016 Cup Final, only one set of fans can attend the derby – and to make matters worse, not even all of Esperance's fans can go.

"To see it before was incredible," sighs Nour Hassouna, who helps run a popular Esperance website, nodding at the empty stands behind both goals. "Now there are so many fan groups – Blood and Gold, Zapatista, Warriors, Fedayn – and they fight each other for control of the curve."

Some fans staged a sit-in outside Esperance's base in downtown Tunis the night before the game and set off

fireworks as a protest, but club president Hamdi Meddeb will not change his mind and the curves will stay closed until the supporters stop fighting.

The fans are fighting partly in frustration at a lack of economic change since the revolution. After all, there is certainly no reason for them to complain about the performances of their team.

Fakhreddine Jaziri later cancels out Taha Yassine Khenissi's penalty and Club Africain sit back and defend for a draw, but Moine Chaabani's side are too strong and Ivorian midfielder Fousseny Coulibaly thumps home a winner. Flares rain down as Esperance take the first derby of the season and make it 10 wins and a draw from their opening 11 league games.

Outside of Africa, Esperance are best known for the presence of their lively and colourful fans at the last two Club World Cups, but they could soon become their continent's greatest ever side.

Having won the domestic Ligue 1 and African Champions League titles for the past two seasons, Esperance are closing in on an unprecedented treble. Since the Champions League started in 1965, TP Mazembe of DR Congo (twice), Nigerian side Enyimba and Egypt's Al Ahly (twice) have all won successive Finals, but no club has ever won three in a row.

While North African clubs have often dominated the competition, Esperance's achievement is all the greater for belying a club tournament beset by fan violence and seized upon by political opportunists.

Esperance have won 29 domestic titles but the Champions League remains their overriding focus.

"The Champions League is our objective," says Farouk Kattou, Esperance's veteran secretary. "Winning Ligue 1 gives us the opportunity to enter the Champions League and that is the most important title in our history."

That importance is not only due to prestige but also financial reality. When asked how much prize money clubs get for winning the domestic league, Kattou leans forward and curls his thumb and forefinger together and shrugs. Zero? Kattou nods.

"We have money from tickets and TV rights and also the president, who always makes his money available," says Kattou as sunbeams ricochet off the club's well-stocked trophy cabinet.

Meddeb is the driving force behind Esperance's success. Taking control of the club when the country was suffering under dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, he has led Esperance through the revolution to new heights.

However, few businessmen at the time could succeed without some involvement with Ben Ali's regime and in 2009 Meddeb controversially called on the club's supporters to vote for the president in what were clearly rigged elections.

> "Winning Ligue 1 gives us the opportunity to enter the Champions League and that is the most important title in our history"
>
> **Esperance secretary Farouk Kattou**

Subsequent political revelations, known as the "Black Books", detailed the links between Ben Ali and Tunisia's business community, and suggested that Esperance had benefitted from government support. Such revelations only cemented the club as the team of the establishment, but success breeds popularity in a country where the transition to democracy, though fragile, has succeeded – unlike in other countries convulsed by the Arab Spring.

Last year Esperance celebrated their centenary by retaining the Ligue 1 title and the Champions League, though the latter was secured after a farcical second leg in Tunis that did little for the standing

One-sided derby...the empty stand which should have been packed with Club Africain supporters for the Esperance game

of African football or organisers CAF.

After a 1-1 draw in Morocco, Esperance were hosting Wydad of Casablanca when a contentious decision was referred to the Video Assistant Referee, only to discover that the machine had not been plugged in. Claims and counter-claims followed before Esperance were declared the winners. Yet rather than eschewing VAR, Esperance would rather that the system was introduced for every group-stage match.

"It would be good as all the clubs could stop making commentaries and accept the referee's decision," says Kattou. "But do CAF have the money? It's expensive."

As CAF recently claimed to have $100million in the bank, the cash is there, but Kattou is not sure if there is the will to take VAR across the continent, from Zambia to DR Congo and beyond.

At least there is no danger of a repeat this time around of last year's shambolic goings-on in Tunis as CAF has abandoned home-and-away legs for a single showpiece Final. As a club with a big following, Esperance would take

Pride...secretary Farouk Kattou in his club's trophy room

> "It would be good as all the clubs could stop making commentaries and accept the referee's decision. But do CAF have the money? It's expensive"
>
> **Kattou on VAR**

Movers & Shakers

The key figures in Tunisian football

MONDHER KEBAIER
Replaced Alain Giresse in 2019 as coach of a national side that remains tainted by its association with dictator Ben Ali.

WADII JARII
President of the Tunisian federation since 2012 and re-elected in 2016. He is a committee member within CAF, where he is rumoured to be positioning himself for a run at the confederation presidency.

TAREK DHIAB
One of Tunisia's greatest ever players was sports minister after the revolution in 2011, he was re-appointed after last year's elections, only to lose the brief when his party could not form a government.

WAHBI KHAZRI
Born in Corsica and a former French under-21 international who made his senior debut for Tunisia in 2013 and is now the joint-fourth top goalscorer for the country.

HAMDI MEDDEB
A junior with Esperance in the 1960s, he left to build up a dairy business, Delice, but returned to become club president in 2007.

Photo: Haykel Hmima/Esperance Sportive de Tunis

Winner...Club Africain try to stop Esperance's Fousseny Coulibaly

plenty of fans if they got there, but the venue could be problematic. As Kattou explains: "If you play one match and that is against Al Ahly and the choice of the Final is Cairo, it's not so good."

Money from the Champions League is vital to Esperance, who pocketed $2.5m for winning last year, although Meddeb claims half of that went on players' wages and bonuses, while on two occasions $100,000 was spent chartering planes to get to matches.

Although Esperance will say that the Champions League is their main focus, in monetary terms the Arab Club Champions Cup is the biggest prize these days.

Esperance have won the title three times and picked up $2.5m for their last victory, in 2017. Last season they were knocked out in the first round by Egyptian side Al Ittihad but the title stayed in Tunisia as Etoile du Sahel took the trophy and $6m in prize money.

This season Esperance went out on penalties to Moroccan side Olympic Safi in the second round and only received $50,000 but December's Club World Cup provided compensation.

Esperance have never got past the quarter-finals in three CWC appearances and in Qatar they lost in the second round to the Saudi side Al Hilal, but then crushed the hosts Al Sadd 6-2 to secure fifth place and $1.5m in prize money.

Player sales are another form of revenue, although the club pay sufficiently well to rival Europe as a destination for some players.

Ghanaian midfielder Kwame Bonsu tried his luck in Sweden before returning to his homeland to join Asante Kotoku and then moving to Tunisia last summer. "When Esperance came knocking at my door it wasn't a big decision," says Bonsu. "I had offers from Europe but it's about more playing time and we are at a different level here."

> "When Esperance came knocking at my door it wasn't a big decision. I had offers from Europe but it's about more playing time and we are at a different level here"
>
> **Ghanaian midfielder Kwame Bonsu**

Top players in Tunisia can command big wages and Esperance's strike force of Tunisian international Khenissi and Libya's Hamdou Elhouni are on around €20,000 a month.

With just one title since 2008, Club Africain tried to buy success to keep up with Esperance but their reckless spending almost sank the club.

The season before last they were paying Congo's Fabrice Ondama €450,000 a year, and although every Ligue 1 club has a marquee signing – Mohamed Konate was on similar wages at Etoile du Sahel – Club Africain had more than one. For example, Algerian winger Ibrahim Chenihi was on €300,000 and with a wage bill like that the debts began to pile up.

By 2018 Club Africain owed a reported $6m and last year they were one of half a dozen African clubs that international players union FIFPro warned players against joining due to non-payment of wages. FIFA eventually banned the club from signing any new players and this season Club Africain had six points deducted and were threatened with relegation unless their debt mountain was tackled.

In October the club called for donations to raise one million Dinars ($350,000) over the next three months. Viewed as the club of the people, such is their status among Tunisians that the $350,000 target was met in a day.

Over the following months more than six million Dinar was raised, but as Club

El Taraji...Esperance celebrated their centenary last year

Africain head towards their centennial celebrations this October the future remains uncertain.

Former president Sim Riahi has been in Dubai since being charged with money laundering in 2017 and the subsequent instability has seen Club Africain reach new lows on the field as well as off it. In February 2019 they were thrashed 8-0 by TP Mazembe in a Champions League group game – a result that Esperance's fans take great pleasure in reminding their rivals about.

Abdessalem Younsi has subsequently taken over as president but Club Africain are being left in Esperance's slipstream as the gap between them becomes wider than the motorway that separates the offices of the two clubs in Tunis.

While Esperance close in on a potentially historic treble, Club Africain's facilities are crumbling and Lassaad Dridi's side face an uncertain future. WS

LIGUE 1: 2019-20

US BEN GUERDANE
Avoided relegation on goal difference last season after a final day 1-0 win over Metlaoui which is now being investigated for match fixing.

CA BIZERTIN
Four-time Ligue 1 winners from the northernmost city in Africa, they were the first Tunisian club to win a CAF title, taking the 1988 Cup-winners Cup.

CS CHEBBA
Based on the north coast and doing well this season after winning promotion last year.

CLUB AFRICAIN
Tunisia's second-oldest side have won 13 Ligue 1 titles and the African Cup of Champions Clubs in 1991. They retain the biggest support among Tunisian football fans.

ESPERANCE SPORTIVE DE TUNIS
Founded in January 1919, Tunisia's oldest club have won four Champions League/Cup of Champions Clubs. Known in Arabic as "*El Taraji*" after the coffeehouse where the club's founders often used to meet.

ETOILE SPORTIVE DU SAHEL
Winners of 10 domestic titles, the Champions League in 2007 and the African Cup-winners Cup/Confederation Cup four times. They were Ligue 1 winners in 2016 and runners-up last season.

CS HAMMAN-LIF CLUB
From a coastal town near Tunis, they are four-time Ligue 1 winners but their last title was in 1956. Promoted in 2018 as winners of the Ligue 2 play-off, they are struggling this season.

JS KAIROUAN
Founded in 1942, their only title win was back in 1977.

ES METLAOUI
Founded in 1956 but their last success was winning Ligue 2 in 2013.

US MONASTIR
Founded in 1923 as Ruspina Sports and changed names in 1942. After political and financial problems last year they are mounting a surprise title challenge this time around.

CS SFAXIEN
Champions League finalists in 2006, they won the last of their eight Ligue 1 titles in 2013. Club chairman Moncef Khemakhem was suspended for life in 2017 for twice pinching the buttocks of an assistant referee but remains in power.

AS SOLIMAN
Founded in 1960 and promoted last season as winners of Ligue 2.

STADE TUNISIEN
From Bardo near Tunis, they were one of the country's best sides from the 1950s to the 1970s but the last of their four titles was in 1965.

US TATAOUINE
They won promotion to Ligue 1 for the first time in 2016 but were immediately relegated. Bounced straight back last year as winners of Ligue 1 but are in trouble again.

Problems...Club African have money worries and face an uncertain future

Eric Abidal

Barca director in furious row with Messi

Eric Abidal is a hugely popular personality at Barcelona, thanks to his part in the Champions League victories of 2009 and 2011 and his recovery from life-threatening liver cancer to resume his playing career. But the Frenchman's role as a unifying figure at Camp Nou has been placed in doubt after Barca's director of football clashed with the club's untouchable superstar, Lionel Messi.

After a tumultuous few weeks – during which Ernesto Valverde was sacked and replaced as coach by Quique Setien, the team experienced a run of poor results, and the directors were criticised for a disappointing January transfer window – Abidal came under pressure to defend himself and the club's hierarchy.

In an interview with Catalan newspaper *Sport*, Abidal effectively accused the senior players of downing tools to get Valverde sacked. In doing so he exposed deep fault lines at the club.

"There are things that I can smell as a former player," he said in the controversial article. "I watched the games and didn't look at the result. I looked at how the games were played, the tactics and the work of the players who didn't play much. I looked at those details.

"Many players were not satisfied or weren't working hard and there was also an internal communication issue.

"I told the club what I thought and they had to make a decision."

Valverde was dismissed in mid-January and replaced by former Real Betis boss Setien, but Abidal explained the move was in the works for about a month.

"It was a club decision," he said. "But we already saw that the problem was

Caution...Lionel Messi is booked in the cup defeat at Athletic Bilbao

In charge...(from left) coach Quique Setien, president Josep Maria Bartomeu and Eric Abidal

internal. It's never easy to make these decisions, but after *El Clasico* on December 18 we began to specify things surrounding his departure."

Setien, an advocate of attacking football, is seen as being more in tune with Johan Cruyff's coaching ideals than his predecessor Valverde, who claimed back-to-back Liga titles but won few points for artistic impression.

"He [Setien] has the DNA," Abidal argued. "He has the idea of working on the small details and players who aren't playing feel part of the group.

"Communication has to flow, and this makes the team come together and compete better."

Abidal's comments drew a furious, immediate and highly unusual response from Messi. Within 90 minutes of the interview going online, the Argentinian used his Instagram account to express his frustration.

He posted an image of the Abidal interview, circled the particular quote about player work rates in red ink and commented underneath: "Sincerely, I don't like to do these things but I think that people have to be responsible for their jobs and own their decisions.

"The players [are responsible] for what happens on the pitch and we are the first to admit when we haven't been good. The heads of the sports department have to take their responsibilities too and above all own the decisions they make."

"Finally, I think that when players are talked about, names should be given because, if not, we are all being dirtied and it feeds comments that are made and are not true."

It was an angry response from a player who has been carrying Barcelona for some time and prompted the inevitable speculation about his future. The 32-year-old's contract runs until 2021 but contains a clause which allows him to leave for free this summer.

Meanwhile, Barca players past and present lined up to defend Messi.

"He has every right in the world to be angry with Abidal," said Rivaldo, while club captain Jordi Alba declared: "This club gets enough crap thrown at it from the outside so we shouldn't be throwing crap at ourselves."

Former French striker Christoph Dugarry told French radio that Barca was "a club of clowns", while sports daily *AS* ran with the headline "Crisis FC".

Club president Josep Maria Bartomeu met with Abidal ahead of a Copa del Rey game away at Athletic Bilbao and they agreed the Frenchman would carry on.

But a shock defeat to Athletic merely added to the club's woes. Only 16 first-team players travelled to Bilbao, while Samuel Umtiti arrived separately due to his involvement in a court case over allegations that he had trashed his rented villa, causing £150,000 of damage.

> "When players are talked about, names should be given because, if not, we are all being dirtied and it feeds comments that are made and are not true"
>
> **Lionel Messi**

Further setbacks came in the form of injuries to Luis Suarez and Ousmane Dembele, which served only to highlight Abidal's failure to sign a striker in the January transfer window.

Abidal also came under fire from Xavi over reports that the former midfielder had been offered the coach's job ahead of Setien but had turned it down to stay in Qatar with Al Sadd.

Abidal denied that he had offered Xavi the job saying: "If he has an offer then let him show it." But Xavi let it be known on Catalan radio that he was "very annoyed" at Abidal's comments.

As always with Barcelona, nothing is straightforward.

John Holmesdale

Jurgen Klinsmann

Out after 76 days as Hertha Berlin coach

Jurgen Klinsmann and Lars Windhorst were supposed to herald a bright new dawn for Hertha Berlin. Klinsmann, the big-name former Germany striker, was hired in November by Windhorst, the businessman who had purchased a 49.9 per cent stake in the club and funded a major recruitment splurge in January.

But Klinsmann quit after just 76 days in charge.

The former Germany, USA and Bayern Munich boss, who had been appointed interim "trainer" until the end of the season, was not exactly a roaring success, winning only three of his nine Bundesliga matches at the helm. He departed with Hertha 14th in the table, six points above the relegation zone. A 3-1 home defeat to Mainz was seemingly the last straw for Klinsi, coming as it did a few days after a German Cup defeat to Schalke.

In a statement on Facebook he wrote: "In a relegation battle, unity, cohesion and focus are the most important elements. If they are not guaranteed, I cannot exploit my potential as a coach and thus cannot live up to my responsibility."

It later emerged that Klinsmann had wanted to be appointed technical director in the summer and, hinting at tensions within the club hierarchy, he contrasted the role of a German "coach" to that of a British-style "manager".

> "I cannot exploit my potential as a coach and thus cannot live up to my responsibility"

"As I understand it, a manager should have total sporting responsibility, including over transfers," he said. "That gives the position more power but the system in Germany has developed differently with sporting directors."

In a Facebook Live chat he said: "It bothered me that someone was always sat there commenting on players and refs. We were at loggerheads. Conditions were very difficult for me, perhaps because I've had other experiences in other countries. I've experienced life in Italy and France and England, of course.

"In Germany we're used to having a manager on the substitutes bench at the side of the pitch and that he participates, that he's there for the players, and keeps the door open for them. I wasn't used to that anymore. I know the English model for a manager – they're called managers in England, not coaches – has only one job and that's being the boss of the club.

"They're different in Germany, where everyone gets to have their say, everyone plays a role, the whole management structure. In the end only one can decide, and I feel it has to be the coach. And we disagreed there. Unfortunately we disagreed on many things."

Klinsmann's comments were seen as a direct attack on Michael Preetz, Hertha's sporting director, whose position would have become untenable if the coach's powers had been extended this summer, when further heavy expenditure in the transfer market was expected.

In Klinsmann's short spell in charge, Hertha broke the Bundesliga record for money spent in the January transfer window, with €78m invested in Krzysztof Piatek (Milan, €27m), Matheus Cunha (RB Leipzig, €15m), Lucas Tousart (Lyon, €25m) and Santiago Ascacibar

Record...Hertha spent €78m in the January transfer window

(Stuttgart, €11m).

Klinsmann's brief time at Hertha provoked a strong reaction from German media, with many questioning whether he will ever work in Germany again.

Though Klinsmann's time in charge of the national side at the 2006 World Cup on home soil is fondly remembered, memories are fresh of his disastrous time at Bayern, where his new-age methods angered many players and resulted in a rare, trophyless season.

John Holmesdale

Javier Hernandez

Chicharito joins Galaxy in huge coup for MLS

Filling the shoes of Zlatan Ibrahimovic was never going to be an easy task, but LA Galaxy looked to have pulled off one of the most significant signings in the history of MLS with the arrival of Javier Hernandez from Sevilla.

The 31-year-old, aka Chicharito ("the Little Pea"), arrives in California after 10 years in Europe, with Manchester United, Real Madrid, Bayer Leverkusen, West Ham United and Sevilla, and will receive a $6million salary for each of the three years of his contract.

Mexico's all-time top international goalscorer and the country's most popular player of his generation will bring new eyeballs and interest in MLS in a way that not even the likes of Ibrahimovic and David Beckham managed to do.

Signing the sport's biggest star in North America is a no-brainer for MLS. The league still lags way behind the Mexican Liga MX and the English Premier League when it comes to attracting TV viewers. But almost 37million of the USA's population see themselves as of full or partial Mexican origin, while Los Angeles has the country's second-largest Hispanic population with 1.8 million, behind only New York's 2.27 million.

Hernandez's move to MLS is part of a wider trend of established players moving from the Mexican league to the USA.

Ahead of the new season, Alan Pulido (Guadalajara to Sporting Kansas City), Oswaldo Alanis (Guadalajara to San Jose Earthquakes), Edison Flores (Morelia to DC United) and Lucas Cavallini (Puebla to Vancouver Whitecaps) all moved from the Liga MX to MLS.

Part of Hernandez's popularity stems from his modest personality. He has gained a huge following on YouTube for his reality-video series in which he gives a glimpse into his life beyond the pitch. In one episode he is recorded making an emotional phone call to his parents, reflecting on his departure from Sevilla for a final career chapter in Los Angeles.

"It's like the beginning of my retirement," he says in a comment that sparked enormous reaction on social media, but he goes on to add: "What I mean is, that we're saying goodbye to a career that we put a lot of effort on."

While much attention has been paid to the player's marketing appeal, there is no doubting his footballing talents will boost Galaxy's on-pitch efforts.

For Galaxy this season the challenge is to go one better than last year, when they lost in the play-off semi-finals to city rivals Los Angeles FC.

The derby match will now have added spice when Hernandez comes face to face with his international team-mate Carlos Vela, voted the league's best player last year.

Few would bet against the Little Pea becoming the MVP of 2020.

John Holmesdale

Fame...Mexico's all-time top scorer

Gianni Infantino

FIFA president has big plans for Africa

Revolutionary new plans are being proposed for the future of African football as FIFA president Gianni Infantino suggests a dramatic overhaul to invigorate the continent's prospects, with the beleaguered Confederation of African Football scurrying to keep up.

It includes a change to the frequency of the Africa Cup of Nations finals, which has already had its immediate dates altered; the creation of an African "Super League"; professionalisation of referees; and much more competition at all levels for men and women.

These ideas come after a six-month stint in charge at CAF headquarters in Cairo for FIFA general-secretary Fatma Samoura. She was there with the purpose of cleaning house, although success has yet to be seen and she departed with CAF's marketing and TV deal with long-time French partners Lagardere Sports having been unilaterally cancelled, setting up a potentially costly court showdown.

Samoura was parachuted in after CAF president Ahmad had been reported to FIFA's ethics committee. Yet despite all the damning evidence he remains in power, allowing Infantino to manoeuvre his plans through an acquiescent CAF executive committee.

Infantino, as was the case with predecessor Sepp Blatter, commands loyalty from Africa's football associations because he holds the real purse strings and, with promises of vastly increased benefits, they will be more than happy to agree to his proposals.

> "Competitions in Africa are maybe 30 or 40 or 50 times less successful than in Europe"

The major one is the Cup of Nations, which Infantino claims would make better commercial sense being played every four years. He believes less frequency means more prestige and will attract better sponsors, although this is a hunch and not yet a reality.

The Cup of Nations is held every two years because it is CAF's only real source of revenue. Although that is less so these days – as FIFA sends Cairo plenty of cash – it has certainly been the case over the last three decades.

It also used to be argued by Issa Hayatou, CAF's president for almost 30 years, that it created much-needed infrastructure as host nations were forced into building new or renovating neglected stadia by the prestige of staging the tournament.

"But I don't see any proliferation of infrastructure and, in terms of revenues, it is miles away from any decent competition," argues Infantino.

"Maybe there is a good reason other confederations play their competitions every four years. For one thing, exclusivity brings value."

Infantino had already forced a change in the timing of the hosting of the 2021 Cup of Nations, although this is because of his expanded Club World Cup in June and July next year.

That was when the next Cup of Nations was supposed to be staged in Cameroon, but that has now been brought forward and will run from January 9 to February 6, 2021.

That old chestnut about the weather was rolled out again to try give a different reason for the change but it remains a nonsense argument. If football in Africa is supposedly at such variance to the rain, how do the various domestic competitions manage to fulfill their fixtures year after year?

In March CAF will get an idea as to whether Cameroon will be able to manage when the country hosts the African Nations Championship, the competition for teams made up of home-based players only.

Rewards...Ahmad (above right) and Fatma Samoura hand out medals at last year's WAFU Cup of Nations

CHAN, as it is better known, will likely go in Infantino's new plan. It is a B-class tournament that receives undeserved A international status.

"I hope CAF has realised that the time has come to change everything," says the FIFA president. "That's why I proposed the creation of a pan-African super league of 20 to 24 clubs which could generate at least $200million per year. Then Africa you can start retaining players and showing the world the quality of its competition."

Infantino's point is that the African

FIFA

Foul...Senegal's Sadio Mane is brought down in last year's Africa Cup of Nations Final against Algeria

Champions League has no allure because all the star African players are overseas. There are more than 1,000 players earning a decent professional living abroad and as many more trying to find fame and fortune in Europe.

The African Champions League was reorganised in 1997 to try to replicate its European counterpart but has bumbled along over the last two decades without capturing the continent's – never mind the world's – imagination.

"Competitions in Africa are maybe 30 or 40 or 50 times less successful than in Europe," speculates Infantino.

The other blight of the African game is theft and fraud. FIFA still conveniently averts its gaze to administrative graft when it is politically expedient to do so, but Infantino is looking to tackle the problem of corrupt match officials.

He says: "One of the major problems is when referees are not paid, or political influence, or when the president of the national association decides who referees a match. This cannot be.

"So, we have chosen a list of 20 referees and, with the right organisation and instructors, they will become full professionals appointed by FIFA," he explains. "We will put them under FIFA protection and they will referee the most important matches in Africa.

"This is performance driven. If they perform well they stay in the list of 20. If not, they are out."

Details of the time-frame for these changes are not yet clear. CAF will have to agree to them first and, where necessary, amend the federation's statutes – which can only be done at the annual congress.

Other decisions can be hurried through the executive committee, where a bevy of potential successors to Ahmad wait in the wings for kingmaker Infantino's blessing...and to do his bidding.

Mark Gleeson

Andre Villas-Boas

Leading the Marseille revival

Two years ago, Andre Villas-Boas crashed a car into a sand dune while competing in the Dakar Rally. Shaken but with no broken bones, he quit the race and returned to his family in Portugal.

As a metaphor for his coaching career, the accident was apt. The man who had been the youngest coach to win a European competition – the 2011 Europa League with Porto, aged 33 – had hit the buffers and retired hurt.

The clubs he has led during his career would light up any veteran manager's CV – Porto, Chelsea, Tottenham Hotspur, Zenit and Shanghai SIPG – but it is easy to forget that Villas-Boas is only 42, with many years still ahead of him.

And so it has proved this season at Marseille, where he has breathed new life into a club that was struggling to compete not only with Paris Saint-Germain, but also the pack chasing the remaining European spots in Ligue 1.

Under AVB, Marseille have established clear blue water between themselves and the rest. As the closest challengers to runaway league leaders PSG they are on course for automatic qualification for the Champions League.

> "Barcelona are Messi dependent, Juventus are Ronaldo dependent. If we're Payet dependent, we're Payet dependent"

Villas-Boas' achievements this season are all the more impressive given the financial constraints that he has been working under. The club are running a considerable deficit and the coach received no playing reinforcements in the January window.

Last summer, the signings of Dario Benedetto and Valentin Rongier were paid for by the departures of Lucas Ocampos, Luiz Gustavo and Clinton N'Jie. Another summer arrival Alvaro Gonzalez has been also quietly effective, fitting in alongside young talent such as Rongier, Lucas Perrin and Boubacar Kamara – a centre-back who has been deployed at the base of midfield.

Villas-Boas has also obtained the best from the previously under-performing Nemanja Radonjic and Jordan Amavi, while the form of OM goalkeeper Steve Mandanda has earned the 34-year-old a recall to the French national side.

In the absence of the injured Florian Thauvin, who was due to return in February, Villas-Boas' clever use of Dimitiri Payet has been instrumental in his side's revival, with Payet's outstanding goals against Saint-Etienne and Toulouse helping to solidify OM's second place in the league.

"Barcelona are Messi dependent, Juventus are Ronaldo dependent. If we're Payet dependent, we're Payet dependent," says Villas-Boas, while also acknowledging the importance of Mandanda, adding. "With these two at this level we can continue to believe."

At Chelsea, AVB's youth ultimately counted against him, with critics noting his close relationship with the players. But a more mature coach has emerged in the south of France, with Marseille sporting director Andoni Zubizarretta explaining: "In training he speaks four languages. At press conferences he does not look for excuses or controversies.

"He does not send subliminal

Mature...OM's AVB

messages to the board. And with me, our exchanges are natural, without anyone grappling for power. If we make a mistake, we make that mistake together. We are certainly more in sync.

"Andre knows where to put his feet. Off the pitch, he has enquired about the youth academy and marketing plans."

That maturity is could be tested this summer, with financial pressure likely to force the departures of Thauvin, whose contract expires in 2021, and Payet.

John Holmesdale

Kevin Volland

Striker could be a Euro 2020 surprise

Bayer Leverkusen fans should thank their lucky stars that the *Werkself*'s in-form striker, who recently made headlines with an outstanding brace in a thrilling 4-3 Bundesliga victory over Borussia Dortmund, did not stay true to his family's sporting business.

Volland's father Andreas represented Germany at ice hockey, and growing up in Bavaria the young Kevin showed a great deal of promise with a stick and a puck, only to eventually come to the conclusion that football was his number-one calling.

At 15 he joined the Munich 1860 youth ranks and five years later he moved to Hoffenheim. For the last three-and-a-half seasons, he has featured for Leverkusen.

Now 27, the left-footed front man has certainly been pulling out all the stops in the last 18 months. During the 2019 calendar year he was directly involved in 30 Bundesliga goals – with 13 of his own and 17 assists – and is on course to produce the same sort of numbers this term. Little wonder a number of Premier League sides, notably Arsenal, are on his case at the moment. With his tiny size 3 boots, his shooting is as accurate as it is powerful, while he also works well with his back to goal.

Up until early last year Volland's position on the field tended to be a moveable feast, as likely to be stationed out wide or "in the hole" as leading the line. But since ex-Ajax and Dortmund boss Peter Bosz took over mid-way through last season, Volland is now used only as an attacking spearhead.

At long last he has put down roots in his best role. What's more, Bosz's direct style suits him down to the ground.

Could he now be in line for a berth in Germany's Euro 2020 squad? Many believe he is a genuine contender, but there is a sticking point: *Bundestrainer* Joachim Low clearly does not appear to rate him.

> "When your last game for the national team is so long ago you stop waiting for that phone call"

Volland earned the last of his 10 caps in 2016 and, to tell the truth, never particularly did himself justice in DFB colours, being more than a little hesitant and scoring on just one occasion.

"My [senior international] hopes have died of late," he says. "When your last game for the national team is so long ago you stop waiting for that phone call."

By way of consolation, though, he could turn to this year's Olympic Games in Tokyo as one of Germany's over-age players at the tournament.

Nick Bidwell

Headlines...Volland impressed against Borussia Dortmund

Words: Nick Bidwell

SCALING

The Belgian has defied the critics since his move to Internazionale

For someone who had to endure abject poverty during his childhood – so much so that his family often went without electricity for weeks and his mother, Adolphine, was forced to dilute the milk in the fridge to make it go further – Belgium and Internazionale striker Romelu Lukaku has gone on to enjoy remarkable career success.

Over the best part of a decade the 26-year-old has showcased the prodigious, the enduring and the explosive.

Barely 16 years of age when he made his debut for Anderlecht in the spring of 2009; a senior international just 10 months later; 84 caps for his country; a bronze medal at the 2018 World Cup; his country's most prolific marksman of all-time with 52 goals, reaching that historical milestone at the tender age of 25.

A player of exceptional power, pace and penalty-box instincts, the Antwerp-born son of Congolese parents has also proved an outstanding finisher at club level, registering over 200 goals in almost 450 games for Anderlecht, Chelsea, West Bromwich Albion, Everton, Manchester United and Inter.

Yet, somehow, such achievements ▸

NEW HEIGHTS

have not translated into widespread fan or media appreciation. Mention the name Lukaku and the detractors immediately come running with a string of negatives: poor first touch, bull-in-a-china-shop disposition, wayward positional sense and flat-track bully tendencies, often accused of not delivering against stronger sides.

It does not seem to make sense: a player with so many alleged flaws and yet still a major transfer-market prize, costing over £187million in total. Signed by Everton from Chelsea in 2014 for £28m, moving to Manchester United three years later in a £75m deal, and making a £74m switch to Inter last summer, he is no bargain-basement buy.

Lukaku himself is only too aware that he is not to everyone's taste. Check his thoughts on the matter in Belgian publication *Sportmagazine* in late 2016, when he said: "I am unloved but I remain on the pitch and there I'm just fine. A lot of people try to create a buzz with their blah-blah chat. I don't look to prolong the debate. I reply on the field. I draw my inspiration from [US basketball stars] LeBron James and [the late] Kobe Bryant. Great champions who were criticised but managed to make themselves respected."

Inspirational...the late LA Lakers basketball star, Kobe Bryant

Even in his Belgian homeland he has found popularity elusive, notably with regard to the national team.

After his international debut in 2010 he needed eight further appearances to get his name on the scoresheet and he received heavy criticism for missing a sitter against Bosnia in October 2016.

Only in the last three years or so have

Thriving...life is good at Inter

the media and sections of the Old Trafford faithful, he became a scapegoat for the club's trophyless woes, a symbol of a once-omnipotent club struggling to keep pace with the likes of Liverpool and Manchester City.

In truth, he was anything but a flop at United. His strike-rate of 42 goals in 96 games meant he considerably outscored fellow front-runners Marcus Rashford and Anthony Martial over the same period. And Lukaku also played a huge role in United's most thrilling achievement last season, scoring twice in a 3-1 victory over Paris Saint-Germain – a result that put United in the quarter-finals of the Champions League on away goals.

Since moving to Italy six months ago, all has gone swimmingly for the Belgian and by early February he already had 20 goalscoring notches on his belt. Quite clearly, coach Antonio Conte is pushing all the right buttons.

Conte – who previously tried and failed to sign Lukaku while in charge at Juventus and Chelsea – is, crucially, playing to the striker's strengths. Mindful that the Belgian is not a genuine target man, uncomfortable when holding the ball up and not a real threat in the air, he only wants to see him on the front foot, running with menace into open spaces.

Forming an excellent front-line partnership with Lautaro Martinez, Lukaku is here, there and everywhere, hunting for chances in the box but also equally obtrusive when dropping deep or drifting out wide to the right. Operational freedom is the key.

Whereas previous coaches such as Mourinho, Solskjaer and former Belgium boss Marc Wilmots insisted on him playing with his back to goal as a point-of-attack pivot, Conte and current Belgium head coach Roberto Martinez do not subscribe to a square-peg-in-round-hole policy.

Lukaku has never has been a one-dimensional battering ram. Isolate him up top or force him into dependency on long balls and crosses and he is not nearly so effective. Conte and Martinez are reaping the benefits of taking the centre-forward shackles off, encouraging him to do what

> "I am unloved but I remain on the pitch and there I'm just fine"

the boo boys gone to ground, their vitriol extinguished by his serial goalscoring for the *Diables Rouges*.

Lukaku blames such recognition difficulties on his lengthy absence from the Belgian domestic scene, having quit Anderlecht for Chelsea at the age of 18.

"I was very young when I started my career and, in their minds, people retained the image of the player I was at Anderlecht," he told *Sportmagazine*. "They weren't aware of the progress I had made. A journalist from the north of Belgium once argued that I didn't deserve to play for Belgium because I wasn't on form for my club. In fact, I'd just scored five goals in four games."

Nor did Lukaku garner huge amounts of respect during his two seasons with Manchester United. His style of play never seemed a snug fit there and in his second season he had a particularly hard time, leaking confidence, admitting to being overweight and falling down the pecking order when Ole Gunnar Solskjaer took over as manager from Jose Mourinho late in 2018.

Showered with brickbats from both

Underrated... his goalscoring record was good at Manchester United

Timeline

MAY 14, 2009
Eleven days after his 16th birthday he makes his Anderlecht debut, in a play-off game against Standard Liege.

AUG 28, 2009
Scores his first goal for Anderlecht, against Zulte Waregem.

MAR 3, 2010
Makes his international debut, in a 1-0 friendly loss to Croatia.

NOV 17, 2010
Gets his first international goals, scoring both in a 2-0 win against Russia.

he does best: hurtling towards goal and linking with other attackers. You should not play off Lukaku; you play with him.

Release the Lukaku handbrake and the effects can be devastating.

Take, for example, the goal that he created for Kevin De Bruyne in Belgium's 2-1 victory over Brazil in the 2018 World Cup quarter-finals, gaining possession inside his own half, surging forward with pace and power, and then playing in De Bruyne to fire home.

Then there was his brilliant strike in Inter's 2-1 Serie A win at Brescia in October, when a barrelling run along the right flank was followed by a smooth inside move and a delightful left-footed curler into the far corner of the net.

He was not enjoying his football at Manchester United and it showed in his demeanour. With Inter, however, it's a completely different story. The side are firing on all cylinders under Conte, trophies are on the cards, and he and his coach very much appreciate one another.

Lukaku always knew the coach was on his side. "My relationship with Conte started when Belgium met his Italy in a friendly [in 2015]," he explained on Italian TV show *Tiki Taka*. "I noticed he played with two forwards, Eder and Pelle, and that after only 15 minutes Pelle had three good goalscoring chances.

"I realised that in such a playing style, in such a system, I would have a lot of opportunities to score myself and that it would enhance my physical abilities.

"I loved his type of game. The two front men have a fundamental role. They have fun and a lot of chances are created.

"After the game we talked a little and he told me he was going to take over at Chelsea. But it wasn't possible for me to go there [as I was under contract at Everton]. I told him that if he went somewhere else in the future, I would follow him."

Lukaku cites five coaches as the most influential in his career: Conte, Martinez, Steve Clarke at West Brom, Ronald Koeman at Everton and ex-Anderlecht boss Ariel Jacobs, the man who gave him his debut.

> "Martinez released me from international prison. [Before he became Belgium coach] I'd play good matches and bad. Now I only put in good performances"

Following a difficult first season at Chelsea – which was mainly spent on the first-team bench or playing for the under-23 side – what the young Lukaku required above all was Premier League first-team football and Clarke would provide it, persuading him to join West Brom on a single-season loan.

The result was a string of impressive performances and 17 top-flight goals. No wonder Lukaku describes Clarke as the figure who released his talent.

Fastidious, opinionated and an avowed enemy of untapped potential, Koeman certainly got the best out of Lukaku at Everton in the 2016-17 campaign, in which the Belgian front man bagged no fewer than 25 Premier League goals.

Apparently the Dutch coach and the young Belgian whippersnapper did not always see eye to eye, but the chemistry worked. "With Romelu we had enough fights about how he needs to press, how he needs to run, how he needs to move," Koeman told the *Liverpool Echo*. "But in the box, with opportunities to score, he is one of the best."

A run of poor results saw Koeman sacked early the following season and, not without justification he blamed his fate on the vast hole left by the sale a few months previously of Lukaku.

As for Jacobs, the coach who took him out of the school classroom in the spring of 2009 and found a place for him in his first team, one

On the up...Everton's record signing (above) and beating Brazil in the 2018 World Cup quarter-finals (right)

MAY 13, 2012
Nine months after joining Chelsea he starts his first Premier League game, against Blackburn Rovers.

AUG 18, 2012
Now on loan at West Brom, he scores his first goal in the Premier League in a 3–0 win against Liverpool.

AUG 30, 2013
Appears as a sub for Chelsea in the UEFA Super Cup against Bayern Munich but misses the deciding penalty in the shoot-out.

JUL 30, 2014
After a season on loan at Everton he signs a permanent deal for a club record fee of £28m.

can only compliment him on his sound judgement and boldness. Some Belgian cynics claimed at the time that Lukaku's sweet 16 call-up was nothing more than a publicity stunt, a move designed to prove that Anderlecht's academy was bearing as much fruit as that of arch-rivals Standard Liege. How wrong that assessment was.

The kid was the real deal and within a year he would be a fully fledged national headliner, the top scorer in the 2009-10 Belgian league, a domestic champion and a full international.

"Hats off to Romelu for the calm way he dealt with the hype," says Jacobs. "He's healthy, cool and adult in his attitude. It's not always easy for such young shoulders to carry this sort of baggage."

Belgiun coach Martinez and Lukaku

Teenage star...it all started at Anderlecht

have been a viable double act for years, with Martinez behind the striker's initial loan move to Everton in the summer of 2013. He subsequently signed him permanently, being more than happy to shell out a then club record fee.

In their three years together at Goodison Park, Lukaku amassed 61 goals in all competitions, and since the pair teamed up internationally, in August 2016, the striker has kept up the good work, netting an incredible 35 times in 33 appearances for Belgium.

Theirs is a mutual appreciation society. While Martinez unhesitatingly describes Lukaku as the best striker in the world, the striker is equally happy to return serve, wholly attributing his recent national team successes to the Spaniard.

"Martinez released me from international prison," Lukaku told

MAY 26, 2014

Scores a hat-trick against Luxembourg but the game is not recognised by FIFA as Belgium made seven substitutions instead of six.

DEC 19, 2015

A goal in a 3-2 loss to Leicester City sees him become the first Everton player to score in eight consecutive games since 1954.

APR 15, 2017

On target against Burnley, he becomes the first player since Dixie Dean to score in nine consecutive games at Goodison Park.

AUG 13, 2017

Scores twice on his Premier League debut for Manchester United as they beat West Ham United 4-0.

Brothers...on international duty with Jordan (left)

Sportmagazine. "[Before he arrived], I'd play good matches and bad. Now I only put in good performances.

"I'm not just speaking for myself. There's Eden [Hazard], Kevin [De Bruyne], Meunier, Carrasco. Since he [Martinez] turned up there, we have many more players who are up for it."

Not surprisingly Lukaku does not include Mourinho and Solskjaer on the "debt of gratitude" list.

Solskjaer simply did not rate him, while Mourinho took a long time to be convinced. Shortly after beginning his second spell in charge of Chelsea, in the summer of 2013, Mourinho was adamant that Lukaku – fresh from a successful temporary posting at West Brom – was still too raw to make a Stamford Bridge first-team impact, recommending another loan spell, this time with Everton. Lukaku felt slighted.

He only played a handful of games under Mourinho at Chelsea but the pair did work well together for a good season and a half at Manchester United, and for a period they functioned hand in glove, Lukaku plundering 11 goals in his first 10 appearances for United and Mourinho regularly praising the Belgian for his work ethic.

> "I told [mum] one day: 'I'm going to play football for Anderlecht. It's going to happen soon'... I was six"

They say that the apple never falls far from the tree and the phrase definitely is appropriate in Lukaku's case. His father Roger was an excellent striker himself, starring in the 1990s for Belgian sides Seraing, Germinal Ekeren, Mechelen and Ostende, as well as the Zaire – now Democratic Republic of Congo – national team.

Slim and lithe, Lukaku senior did not have anything like his son's muscular mass but he was a fine finisher all the same, particularly dangerous with his potent left-footed shooting.

If Romelu and his younger brother Jordan – who these days plays left-back for Serie A rivals Lazio – are now both senior Belgium internationals, dad Roger must take a lot of the credit. He passed on the love of the game to his kids, encouraged them to sign for his old club FC Boom as toddlers and had plenty of good advice to offer. Romelu and Jordan's parents divorced when the children were in their early teens, but Roger remained their footballing guide and mentor, especially uncompromising when dishing out discipline.

"You will never catch me in a nightclub sipping champagne," Romelu once explained. "In our house, the word 'disco' had a diabolical meaning. After Anderlecht clinched the Belgian league title in 2010 I remember asking my father if I could go to a nightclub.

"My dad wouldn't allow it because I had school the next day. "

At the end of Roger's footballing career he suffered no end of economic difficulties. Steady work was hard to find and the family lapsed into penury. No car, no cash for bills, hardly enough money for food and definitely no luxuries. Times were tough and it was at this point that Lukaku made a life-defining promise to his loved ones as well as himself.

"Some days I'd come home from school to find my mum crying," he said in a no-holds barred interview on the *Players' Tribune* website in 2018. "So I finally told her one day: 'Mum, it's going to change. You'll see. I'm going to play football for Anderlecht. It's going to happen soon. We'll be good. You won't have to worry anymore'. I was six."

Suddenly football was not only a game to him; it was a means to an end, a route out of poverty and despair. He now had a mission and put his heart and soul into making a name for himself, impressing in the schoolboy ranks of FC Boom and KFC Wintam, scoring goals galore at the Lierse academy, then decamping at the age of 13 to Anderlecht, where he would continue to whip up a storm.

Not for one moment did he ever doubt his capacity to climb to the top.

"In Romelu, I discovered a 16-year-old of great mental toughness," said his old Anderlecht coach Jacobs. "That's what has brought him so far." WS

Unconvinced...a rare game under Jose Mourinho at Chelsea

MAR 31, 2018

Scores in a 2-0 victory over Swansea City and becomes the fifth-youngest player to get 100 Premier League goals.

JUN 6, 2018

Becomes Belgium's all-time leading scorer with his 31st goal in a 3-0 victory over Egypt.

AUG 26, 2019

Scores on his Serie A debut as Inter beat Lecce 4-0.

Romelu Lukaku

the numbers game

TRANSFER FEES

£10m	£28m	£75m	£74m
Anderlecht to Chelsea (2011)	Chelsea to Everton (2014)	Everton to Man United (2017)	Man United to Inter (2019)

BELGIUM

84

CAPS

52

GOALS

INTER'S RECORD SIGNINGS

€80m	€49m	€40m	€38m
Romelu Lukaku (Manchester United, 2019)	Christian Vieri (Lazio, 1999)	Joao Mario (Sporting CP, 2016)	Radja Nainggolan (Roma, 2018)

LEAGUE DEBUT GOALS

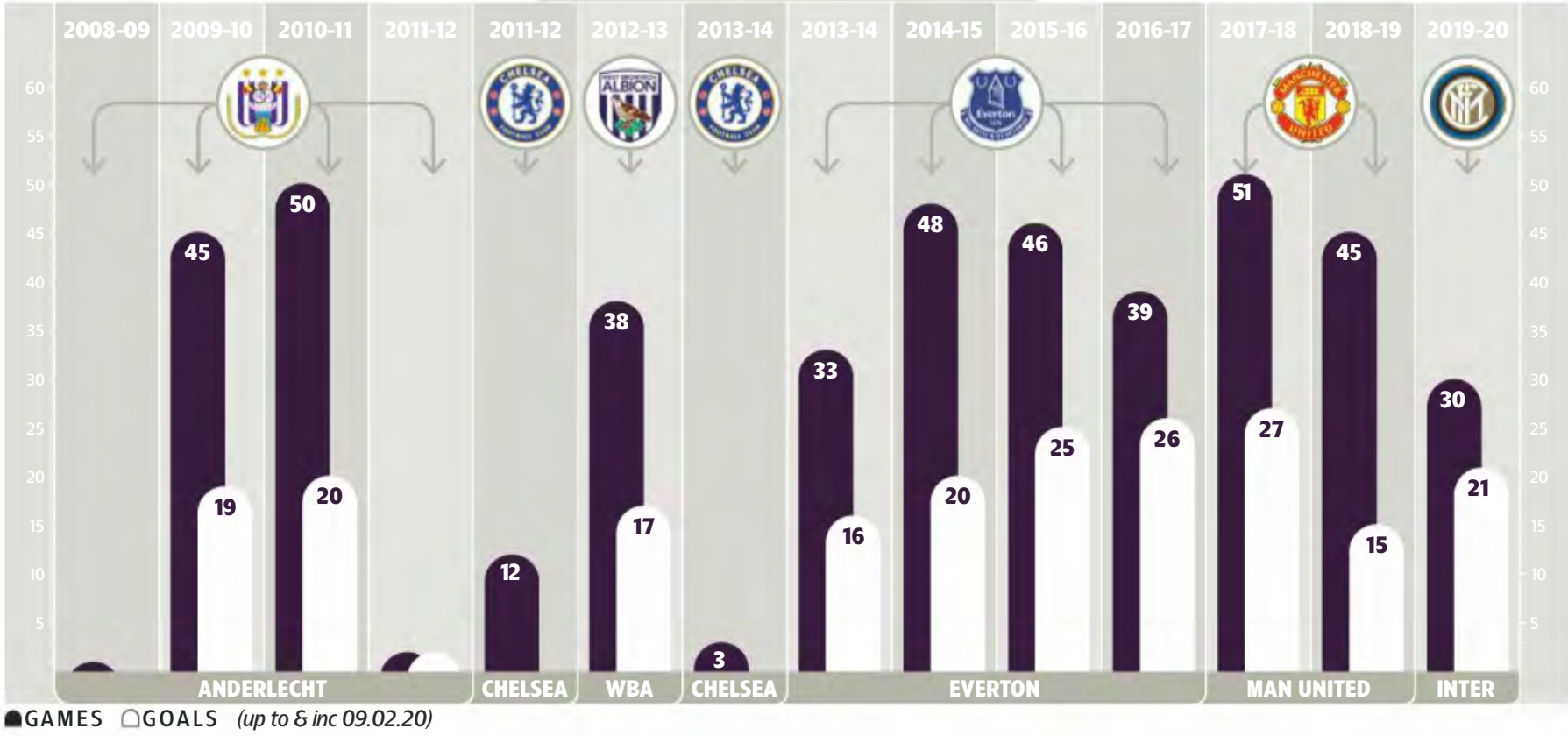
5

teams that he has scored for on his league debut: Anderlecht, West Brom, Everton, Manchester United, and Inter

2018 WORLD CUP

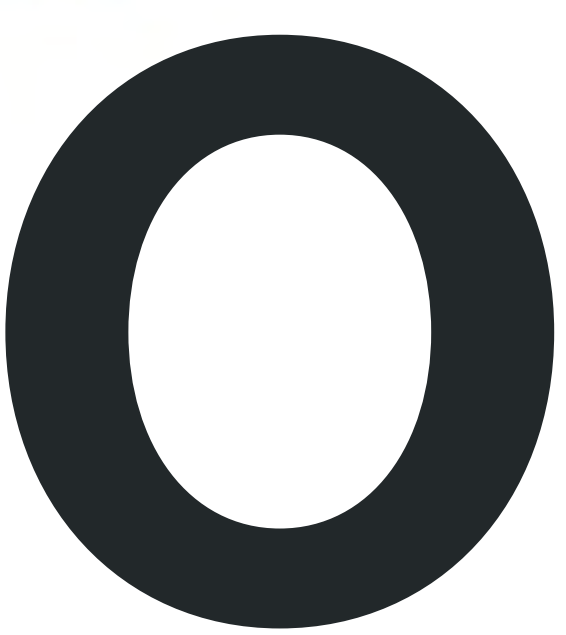
GOLDEN BOOT	SILVER BOOT	BRONZE BOOT
Harry Kane (Eng) 6 goals	Antoine Griezmann (Fra) 4 goals	Romelu Lukaku (Blg) 4 goals

HONOURS



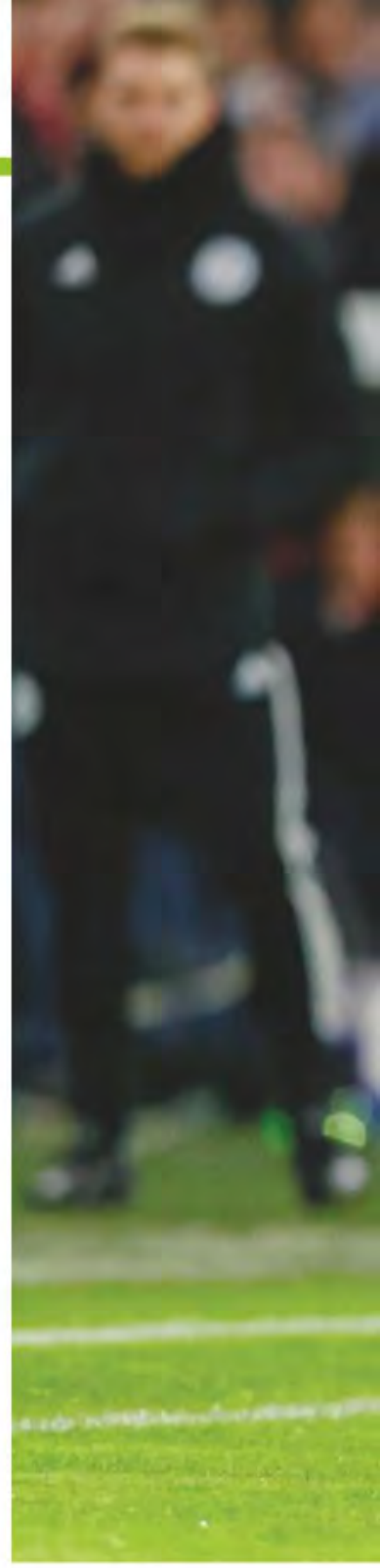
GAMES GOALS *(up to & inc 09.02.20)*

SPECIAL FEATURE



10 transfer themes

Nick Bidwell highlights the most interesting developments from the January window



Loan...Alvaro Odriozola

Maestro...Dani Olmo

1 ANOTHER UNUSUAL TWIST IN DANI OLMO'S CAREER

That attacking midfielder Olmo chose to leave Dinamo Zagreb for RB Leipzig says a great deal about his level-headed take on what is best for his career.

Having won his first full cap for Spain last autumn and starred in the 2018 European Under-21 Championship triumph, he had a gaggle of top clubs tracking his every move for the Croat champions, including Bayern Munich, Borussia Dortmund, Juventus, Milan, Barcelona – where he spent seven years in the La Masia academy – Atletico Madrid, Manchester City and Manchester United. Yet the 21-year-old chose to throw in his lot with Leipzig, having been impressed with their ambitious project and reputation for putting their faith in youth.

In this particular equation, prestige and elite wages were only of fleeting consideration; more important were the practicalities of his next step as a professional: choice of domestic league, style of play there, amount of game time on offer and scope for self-improvement. In both the long and short-term, he took a precise plane: to crack the European big time and perform well enough in the Bundesliga to earn a spot in Spain's Euro 2020 squad.

At a relatively early stage of the process he had decided it was Leipzig or nothing, converted to the cause by a meeting in Zagreb with RB director of sport Markus Krosche and a phone conversation with the German club's coach, Julian Nagelsmann. Even when Bayern Munich attempted to hijack the deal, he had no intention of changing his mind, declaring: "I'd made my decision and given my word...I was and am convinced that Leipzig is the best place for me."

Bayern were thought to be willing to outbid RB, but Dinamo Zagreb's director of sport, Zoran Mamic, told Croat daily *Sportske Novosti* that Olmo did not want to play in either England or Italy and insisted on signing for Leipzig.

Interestingly, no one seems to know exactly how much RB will have to shell out for Olmo. Leading German magazine *Kicker* has mentioned a basic initial fee of €20million, plus further unspecified add-ons, while *Marca* in Spain has alluded to a €30m payment and another €5m in bonuses. *Sportske Novosti* suggests that RB paid €18.5m up front and could be forced to hand over a further €16.5m in appearance and achievement top-ups.

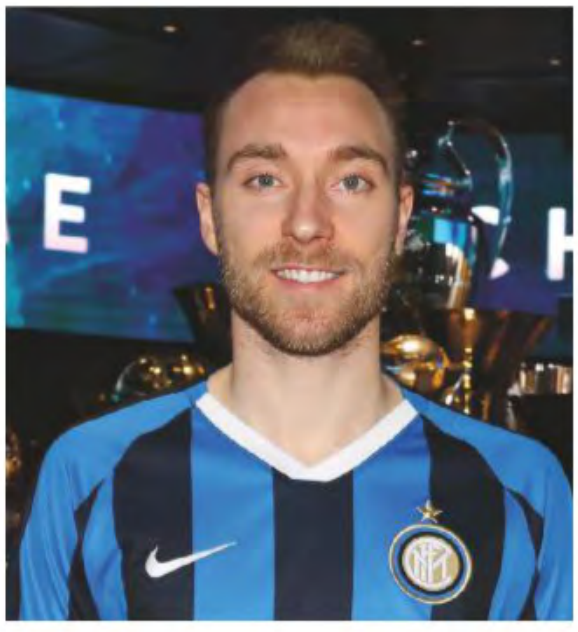
Not that RB will be complaining about the outlay. In the face of stiff competition they have one of Europe's shiniest new stars who is a maestro in any position in the attacking third.

2 THE EMERGENCY CALL

Hit by a defensive injury crisis, Bayern Munich went borrowing at the Bernabeu, securing a six-month loan deal for Real Madrid's out-of-favour Spanish international full-back Alvaro Odriozola. But not everyone in the Bayern boardroom was in agreement. Pointing to the fact the 24-year-old had only appeared in a handful of games for Real this season, some would have preferred a move for Shakhtar Donetsk's Brazilian right-back Dodo.

3 THE PREMIER LEAGUE SHOPPING EXPEDITION

Totally rejuvenated by the arrival last summer of new coach Antonio Conte, Serie A title contenders Internazionale only used pounds sterling in January, acquiring Tottenham Hotspur playmaker Christian Eriksen for a cut-price £18m, veteran Manchester United left-back/wing-back Ashley Young for £1.35m and Nigerian international winger Victor Moses, whom Chelsea have loaned out until the end of the season



Inter buy...Danish playmaker Christian Eriksen

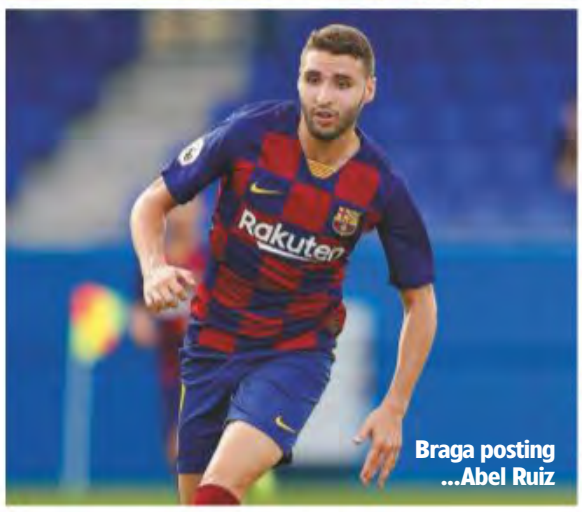
4 RESTORING FAITH

With Manchester United no longer a member of the Champions League inner sanctum, attracting big-names to Old Trafford has become an increasingly difficult task. United's mid-term swoop for Sporting and Portugal attacking midfielder Bruno Fernandes was as much about symbolism as giving the team a creative upgrade. But the 25-year-old has not come cheap: a £47m basic fee, plus another £20m in possible add-ons.

Upgrade...Bruno Fernandes

Germany calling... Jean-Clair Todibo

Surprise...Carles Perez


Braga posting ...Abel Ruiz

Familiar...Carles Alena (in green) taking on his parent club for Betis

5 BARCELONA RELEASE THE YOUNGSTERS

Barcelona president Josep Maria Bartomeu and technical director Eric Abidal stand accused of a string of January transfer-window crimes: no over-arching plan, crass errors of communication, short-sightedness and scant concern for the club's time-honoured identity as a youth development hot spot.

Rather than plugging the glaring gaps in their squad, Barca instead chose to concentrate on loaning out a string of good quality youngsters, with the list including playmaker Carles Alena (Real Betis), winger Carles Perez (Roma), centre-forward Abel Ruiz (Braga), French centre-back Jean-Clair Todibo (Schalke) and Senegalese full-back Moussa Wague (Nice).

This cull of the fledglings has not proved popular, with fans annoyed at what they regard as self-inflicted damage to the *Blaugrana* identity. Barca supporters fear that the club's much-admired La Masia academy is being marginalised.

Not so long ago, La Masia graduates used to have a purely sporting role, deployed in the first-team to supplement the ranks of the imported stars. Those days, though, appear to be ebbing away, with kids offloaded to raise the funds for more big signings.

Supporters especially took exception to the departures of Alena and Perez, both of whom grew up at La Masia, totalling 22 years at Camp Nou between them.

Despite showing much promise and winning Spanish under-21 caps, Alena effectively was frozen out in the first half of this season, not making a single appearance from August to December. Naturally, he was keen to move on for regular first-team football and in January agreed a six-month loan deal with Betis. While his temporary employers have no option to buy, it cannot be assumed that he will fly back to the nest in the summer.

The decision to allow Perez to leave for Roma – initially on loan, with a definitive €11m transfer to follow at the end of the season – was also somewhat surprising. Although by no means a regular, the 21-year-old certainly made an impact in the pre-Christmas period, scoring his first goal for Barca in a 5-2 thrashing of Real Betis in August, racking up a number of assists in La Liga and opening his Champions League goalscoring account in the 2-1 win at Internazionale.

Barca will claim they are merely engaged in a squad spring clean – but could this be more a case of economic necessity? In the club's current financial model, balancing the books is paramount and, if recent reports are to be believed, Barcelona need to raise around €100m before the end of June.

More difficult HR decisions could be in the pipeline.

French coast... Moussa Wague

6 THE SOUTH AMERICAN CONNECTION

Hats off to Real Madrid, who fought off Barcelona, Atletico Madrid, Paris Saint-Germain and Manchester City for the signature of Brazilian boy wonder Reinier Jesus. The 18-year-old Flamengo and Brazil under-23 starlet is quite the virtuoso and Real will be delighted to have obtained so much potential for an affordable €30m transfer fee. Under contract until 2026, he will see out this season with Real's B team, Castilla.

Affordable... Reinier Jesus

7 THE ETERNAL WANDERER

The 35-year-old African striker Emmanuel Adebayor shows no sign of wanting to jump off the transfer merry-go-round. A free agent after leaving Turkish outfit Kayserispor, the former Arsenal, Tottenham Hotspur and Manchester City front man is now off to ply his trade in Paraguay, where he will lead the line for leading domestic side Olimpia. In almost two decades as a professional, the Togo international has now worn the colours of no fewer than 10 clubs.

Traveller...its Paraguay next for Emmanuel Adebayor

8 RETURNING FROM CHINA

After several recent attempts to force through a move back to Europe, Belgian left-winger Yannick Carrasco finally had his wish granted by Dalian Professional, who allowed him to join his old club Atletico Madrid on loan until the end of the season. Another Chinese returnee was former Watford centre-forward Odion Ighalo, who, in a shock turn of events, swopped Shanghai Shenhua for a stint on loan at Manchester United.

Return... Yannick Carrasco

Clever...Lucas Tousart

9 THE SWIFT LOAN-BACK

You have to be a savvy negotiator to pull off this type of deal as the selling party. Receive a good price for a player, but retain his services for a little longer. That was the case with Lyon president Jean-Michel Aulas, who sold defensive midfielder Lucas Tousart to Hertha Berlin for €25m, then persuaded the German club to immediately loan back the French under-21 for six months. Not only does Aulas get the money, he also has the time to find a replacement.

10 THE BEST "OPTION TO BUY"

Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp described Emre Can's mid-season move from Juventus to Borussia Dortmund as a "win-win situation" for the latter. The Ruhr powerhouse, who initially have Can on loan, should benefit from the holding midfielder's experience, adaptability and drive. And at the end of the season they have the right to definitively buy him for a more than reasonable €25m.

Option...Emre Can

Facetoface

CHRIS SMALLING

"It's gone better than I could ever have imagined"

The former Manchester United defender is loving his new life in Rome

Christmas this year was very different for Roma defender Chris Smalling. Rather than return to the frost and fog of Manchester, the Englishman and his family, together with friends, spent a glorious sun-blest festive break in his new home on the ancient Via Appia in Rome.

And it would be a mistake to imagine the 30-year-old as some sort of Napoleon, languishing in exile on St Helena, wondering why he no longer plays for either England or Manchester United.

When United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer told him in August that he would no longer be an automatic first-choice selection, Smalling knew what he wanted to do. Solskjaer told him that there would be plenty of football for him, but that meant "maybe half the games", says Smalling.

So when a £3million loan offer came in from Roma he jumped at it. One morning he was in Manchester talking it through with Solskjaer, the next day he was in Italy talking to Roma's Portuguese coach Paulo Fonseca. It was all done and dusted in 48 hours.

"It was a little bit daunting at first," recalls Smalling. "For someone who had lived all his life in England it was quite a big change in a matter of days.

"But it was an experience that I was looking forward to, and when the opportunity came, and my family was up for it, then I didn't want to have regrets about not taking it.

"At this point it has gone better than I could ever have imagined."

Smalling was rated Roma's best player by sports daily *La Gazzetta dello Sport* in January's 1-1 derby draw with Lazio, although he feels that "nine times out of 10, Roma should have won that game".

That was by no means the first time the critics had rated him Roma's top performer. For much of this season he has looked poised, assured and totally authoritative, winning a lot of approval.

Of course, there is nothing Italians appreciate more than a good defender and of his initial impressions of Serie A he says: "I find it very competitive. When you watch it from England and you see Juventus winning every year it doesn't seem that way, but when you come here you find that it is very competitive.

"Even the smaller teams are not easy to break down, there are no easy games."

Smalling, Romelu Lukaku and Christian Eriksen are the most recent high-profile recruits to a league which landed one of the biggest stars of all last season in Cristiano Ronaldo. He might be 35 now, but the Portuguese was pretty unstoppable as he helped Juve to a 2-1 win against Smalling and his team-mates at the Olimpico just before Christmas. At one point Ronaldo prompted a gasp of enthusiastic approval from fans when he gave Smalling the slip. Generously, even the defender himself was impressed, explaining: "Ronaldo goes quiet for three or four games and everyone is saying he is past it – and then he goes and scores eight goals in six games.

"He is someone who is special. He could rest on his laurels, given what he has already achieved, but he still has that drive. That is what makes him so great."

Smalling has clearly adapted comfortably to Italy, yet not all British exports have settled so well. Back in 1961, Jimmy Greaves scored nine goals in his first 12 league games for Milan but was back in England by Christmas. Then there was Ian Rush, whose form never reached Liverpool levels during his one and only season with an admittedly poor Juventus.

To be fair, others such as Irishman Liam Brady, also in the 1980s, did much better when it came to integration. Key to settling in is to learn Italian and Smalling has already set out on that road, revealing: "Here at the club you could almost get by without Italian because a lot of the staff speak English, but I wanted to be able to communicate and make that effort.

"It would be nice, come the end of the season, to have picked up a language."

In the beginning, most of his communication with coach Fonseca was in English, which the Portuguese speaks well. However, as time has gone by, he finds team talks and training sessions in Italian cause no problems since he has long since picked up key words such as "left, right, ➤

ROMA
QATAR
AIRWAYS

press, *uomo* (man on)" and so on.

Smalling believes it is no cliche to suggest that Italian football is more tactically organised, with even lower-table sides building their whole game on defensive solidity. He says that he has worked more on tactics at Roma than with any previous club.

Respected figures such as Fabio Capello and Arrigo Sacchi regularly point out that Italian teams can be in difficulty in the Champions League because Serie A football is not played at the same intense rhythm as, in particular, the Premier League, but Smalling says: "I don't know about that. At times, Italian teams are very street wise about how to take the steam out of a game if you are leading, whereas in England we're more gung-ho."

If there has been a dark cloud on Smalling's Italian horizon it has clearly come through his experience of racism or, at the very best, racist misunderstanding. That happened in December when Rome sports daily *Corriere dello Sport* published a preview of the next day's Internazionale v Roma clash under the headline "Black Friday", complete with full-page pictures of both Smalling and his former United team-mate Lukaku, who is now with Inter.

> "Nine times out of 10, Roma should have won that game"
> **Smalling on the recent derby game against Lazio in Serie A**

Even though *Corriere dello Sport* editor Ivan Zazzaroni immediately claimed that the paper's intention had been to celebrate the "magnificent wealth of diversity" in football, that front page prompted a well-documented international row, with many in Italy and elsewhere accusing *Corriere dello Sport* of clumsy insensitivity. Remember, this season had already seen ugly racist incidents at games involving Lukaku and Brescia's Mario Balotelli to name but two.

For many Italians "Black Friday" is just a marketing slogan for a weekend when the IT multi-nationals hope to sell a lot of smartphones and laptops. So did Smalling feel that the Black Friday front page had been a case more of ignorance and insensitivity rather than racial hatred? After all, someone – perhaps innocently – had decided to preview the game by focusing on two of the main protagonists, two men with much in common: they are former team-mates, had both done spectacularly well in their first six months in Serie A and, of course, both are black.

Derby duel...getting the better of Lazio's Marco Parolo

Inter pal...with ex-United team-mate Romelu Lukaku

"I was obviously aware of this because such a big thing was made of it – and rightly so," says Smalling. "I was more disappointed, and yes, a bit offended, but it is the sort of thing you see and you think to yourself, why?

"Surely, things like that should not be printed in mainstream national publications."

On the subject of the Three Monkeys in an anti-racism campaign for Serie A two weeks later – something that to many seemed blatantly offensive – Smalling could only conclude this is, above all, an educational problem, arguing: "I couldn't quite believe that, when I saw it first. I thought it wasn't for real, given the storm that had already happened to then go and do that.

"It is a real disappointment, but I think that a lot of it is down to a lack of education. I would like to think that is the main driver behind anyone who intentionally does things like this."

Education is not a word used casually by Smalling. After all, he is a rare beast in the firmament of top-level professional footballers in that he has three A Levels: in Business Studies, Economics and Maths respectively. His mother, who brought him and his brother up as a single mum following the death of her husband when Chris was just five, focused much of that upbringing on school, ensuring that both her boys studied all the way through to A levels.

The result was that when Chris, already an England schoolboy international, went for trials with Fulham and Middlesbrough at the age of 18, he had been accepted by two universities.

Unlike many of his contemporaries he went into his trials in a very relaxed frame of mind, recalling: "Very few people are going to get a contract at 18 but the fact that I had my A Levels and university already in the bag meant

SMALLING AND THE PREMIER LEAGUE EXODUS

Chris Smalling is part of a new wave of players who have relocated to Serie A from the Premier League, including a number of former team-mates at Manchester United who have been deemed surplus to requirements of late.

Romelu Lukaku has been in impressive form for Internazionale since moveing there last summer, and he was joined there by United loanee Alexis Sanchez, who has been sidelined with an ankle injury.

In January, Ashley Young, whose United contract had been set to expire this summer, also joined Inter, on a short-term deal with an option to extend next season. Young was joined at Inter by Spurs' Christian Eriksen and Victor Moses, on loan from Chelsea.

Inter coach Antonio Conte believes from his time at Chelsea that the intensity of Premier League football can benefit his side in Serie A. So far he seems to have been proved right, with Inter leading the challenge to defending champions Juventus.

that going to these trials was just a bit of a bonus. For me, university was Plan A, football was Plan B."

And Plan B, via Fulham and then Manchester United, worked out very nicely. So where does Plan C take him?

Right now, he makes no secret of the fact he wants to stay with Roma and says: "The manager here is very ambitious. Obviously getting back into the Champions League is one of the things he wants to do and if we could win the Europa League along the way, that would be fantastic too."

What might also be fantastic would be for him to reclaim a place in the England team. He has not played international football since June 2017 but could his current good form earn a recall? Has he heard from England manager Gareth Southgate recently and does he still hope for a call-up to the Euro 2020 squad?

Smalling admits: "No, I haven't spoken to him but I know he has watched some of my recent games and, of course, I would love a call-up for Euro 2020 "

Whatever the immediate future holds for him, there is much more to be said about Chris Smalling. He is not only an excellent footballer but also a modern one, open to new ideas such as the vegan diet which, thanks to wife Sam, he has now followed for three years. He claims that the diet – no meat, fish, milk or eggs – has helped cure his knee tendonitis while also speeding up his recovery after games.

And as someone who grew up in a household where money was tight, it is no surprise he keeps an eye out for the disadvantaged via Football Beyond Borders, a British social charity, which helps disadvantaged kids who might be passionate about football but who fall a bit by the wayside at school.

Interview by Paddy Agnew

Test...getting to grips with Cristiano Ronaldo

Facetoface

DEAN GORRE

"We can now pick players from all over the world"

The Suriname coach on a rule change that could revolutionise the national side

Due to tough citizenship laws that forbid dual nationality, Suriname has never been able to dip into the talent that exists in former colonial power Holland, with Dutch internationals Edgar Davids, Ruud Gullit, Frank Rijkaard, Clarence Seedorf, Virgil Van Dijk and Georginio Wijnaldum all of Suriname heritage.

But with the interpretation of the citizenship act having recently changed, Suriname coach Dean Gorre now has the chance to select a squad from a much bigger pool.

And the timing could not be better as Suriname have qualified to compete in the CONCACAF Gold Cup for the first time next year.

What will be the impact of the rule change that allows Dutch players of Suriname heritage to play for you?

It's huge. We'll be going from an amateur team to a professional squad. It's a massive difference. All the locally based players are amateurs with regular jobs and just two days of training. Now we have access to players from elsewhere in the world, mainly Europe, Holland, who are all pros.

Are you now going into battle with the Dutch FA to persuade the better players of Surinamese heritage to play for you rather than Holland?

No, not at this moment in time. Everybody can understand the first objective is to play for Holland for those who have been brought up in the country. I can understand that they pick to play for Holland first. But there are so many players who haven't been picked by the Netherlands and still have the quality to play at a decent level.

How big is your list of players to try to recruit for the Gold Cup next year?

Most of the players I know. There are about 150 players around Europe, in different countries, who qualify now to play for Suriname. A few in South America as well. Of course, I have a short list who are ready and have been asked the question if they want to join us.

Presumably this will make you much more competitive at the Gold Cup?

Yes, that's true, but now we have first to secure the international clearances. We are in the process of doing that now. Only once we've got those clearances can we be 100 per cent sure that they can play for us.

What was the impact of Suriname securing Gold Cup qualification?

It was wonderful. Football is, of course, the number one sport in the country and people are delighted to see Suriname doing well. I've been there for a year and a half as coach and you can see the impact of the players and the team going from strength to strength. You can see that in the crowds, as well. Before, when the national team played, there could be as little as 100 people in the stadium. Now the last game we had some 3,000 – the stadium was full.

Are there the resources for proper preparation for the Gold Cup, as well as the start of the 2022 World Cup qualifiers?

We will have friendlies in March and June to prepare for the World Cup qualifiers in September and it will be good then to get the balance with the new players right. We have 18 months to get ready for the Gold Cup.

It is a long wait for the Gold Cup...

Yes, I wish it was this year rather than next year, but, on the other hand, we can work towards it and create a better balance.

How have you enjoyed the job?

It's been like a roller coaster, really. I was born in Suriname but was only two years old when I left; growing up in the Netherlands but the past 20 years living in England. Now, 18 months living in Suriname has been quite challenging because they were not used to professional football, with professional discipline and all those sorts of things. It was a change for me to come to a new environment and try and change the things that they do for the better. Looking back it's not been easy, it's been hard, but because we qualified everything is now totally different. I've been in professional football my whole life and suddenly you come into an amateur environment, so that's always going to be hard. It's not easy, you have to change your expectations and standards. But I was also lucky that the league was finished in July/August and I could train with the players from then on, on a full-time basis. They trained with me all the time and that's probably why we're able to achieve the success.

Do you get support from some of the big-name Surinamese players in Holland?

I get a lot of recognition from ex-players and current players. Some help to raise money for the squad to get extras, like boots. It's difficult for players in Suriname to get proper footwear, they cannot afford them. Players like Georginio Wijnaldum, Jeremain Lens, Quincy Promes have all helped.

Interview by Mark Gleeson

TOEGANG ALLEEN VOOR SPELERS & OFFICI

TOMORROW'S STARS TODAY

Talentscout

NATURAL GOALSCORERS

Words Nick Bidwell

Joshua ZIRKZEE

(Bayern Munich, Ger, & Hol)

In a sentence
Eighteen-year-old Dutch supersub who sprung out of the Bayern shadows late last year, scoring with his very first touch on his Bundesliga debut, against Freiburg, and repeating the exact same trick a few days later, against Wolfsburg.

What they say...
Former Schalke and Holland centre-forward Youri Mulder: "This kid has a massive career in front of him. He's a serious talent. He has the perfect build for a striker, a nose for goals and, what's more, he can really play. In short, he's a fantastic footballer"

Jochen Sauer, Bayern Munich's head of youth development: "He is the type of striker you don't often see today: big, athletic but technically very accomplished too. He's just completed his first short steps on the road to becoming a professional. He has to carry on working hard. If he does that, I wouldn't put it past him making at Bayern"

The story so far
Born in the Dutch town of Schiedam, near Rotterdam, as a schoolboy he played for local clubs VV Hekelingen and Spartaan '20, then spent three years in the junior ranks at Den Haag prior to featuring in the youth team at Feyenoord.

Scouted by many top European sides, including Arsenal and Manchester United, he came close to signing for Everton, only to eventually join Bayern Munich on turning 16.

After impressing for Bayern's youth and reserve sides he travelled to the USA with the senior squad on their 2018 pre-season tour, scoring in his first game, against Paris Saint-Germain.

A Holland under-19 international, he was to the fore in last season's UEFA Youth League with four goals in six starts before making his competitive first-team debut for Bayern in December, coming off the bench a few minutes from the end of a 3-1 Champions League win over Tottenham Hotspur. The following week came his heroics to help defeat Freiburg and Wolfsburg.

3 THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT ZIRKZEE

- Back in 2017, while on Feyenoord's books, he played for Everton in a youth tournament in Prague without the Dutch club's permission.
- He was sent off for pushing over one opponent and slapping another when Bayern lost 3-2 to Borussia Dortmund in the 2018 German Under-17 Final.
- He scored after 104 seconds against Freiburg and 149 against Wolfsburg.

> "He is the type of striker you don't often see today: big, athletic but technically very accomplished"
> **Jochen Sauer, Bayern head of youth development**

The next step
Bayern intend to take it nice and gently with him for the moment, with a mixed diet of senior-side bench-warming and competitive action with the club's reserves, who play in the German third tier. While unlikely to use him as a starter with the first XI, they will have no hesitation in deploying him as a last-gasp impact sub. The word is that next season he will be the official understudy to main striker Robert Lewandowski, with an increased amount of game time.

Strengths
His aerial ability, physical presence, comfort on the ball and a good turn of pace. He is ravenous in his pursuit of goals and displays ice-cold finishing.

Weaknesses
Can be hot-headed and has been sent off on more than one occasion with Bayern's youngsters. More movement would not go amiss.

Habib DIALLO

(Metz, Fra, & Sen)
Said to be a €20m target for Chelsea in January, the 23-year-old has been on a scoring mission for the last 18 months, netting 26 times as Metz claimed the Ligue 2 title last season and has already racked up a dozen more this term. He is a graduate of the Generation Foot academy in Dakar.

Kemal ADEMI

(Basle, Swi, & Ger)
German-born centre-forward of Kosovan extraction who has been on fire since moving from Neuchatel Xamax to Basle last summer. Works the channels well and has a nice touch for a big man. At the start of the season he was third-choice for FCB; now he is the undisputed number one. Once on the books of Hoffenheim.

Andrea PINAMONTI

(Genoa & Ita)
Italy's under-20 skipper amply demonstrated his ability to put the ball in the net at last year's world championships with four goals. Nicknamed "The Archer" due to his bowman goal celebration, he made his debut at 17 in the Europa League for Internazionale but now on loan at Genoa, who have an option to buy.

Fabio SILVA

(Porto & Por)
The 17-year-old became the youngest scorer in Porto's history in October with a goal in the 5-0 domestic cup victory over SC Coimbroes. His father, Jorge, won caps for Portugal as a defensive midfielder and his elder brother, Jorge junior, is a centre-back at Lazio.

Shon WEISSMAN

(Wolfsberger, Aut & Isr)
In his first season in Austria following a free transfer from Maccabi Haifa, the muscular Israeli averaged a goal a game in the first half of the campaign and was top of the domestic scoring charts, with even Red Bull Salzburg's Erling Haaland – now at Borussia Dortmund – unable to keep up. Notably got four goals in 36 minutes in a 5-0 win over Mattersburg and has been linked with a move to La Liga, although says he prefers the German Bundesliga.

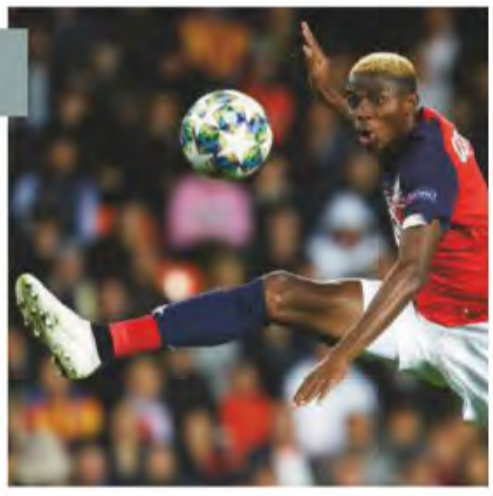
Alexander SORLOTH

(Trabzonspor, Tur, & Nor)
Managed just one goal in 20 games for Crystal Palace but has not stopped scoring since moving to Turkey on a two-season loan deal. Capped 22 times, the 24-year-old had found the back of the net 16 times in Super Lig by early February and local fans now call him the "King of the North".

Jordan LARSSON

(Spartak Moscow, Rus, & Swe)
The son of Henrik Larsson, the 22-year-old is no slouch himself when it comes to goals. Regularly on target for Norrkoping in the 2019 Swedish top flight, he made a sluggish start in Russia after moving in August, but emphatically broke the log-jam with a supersub brace in a 3-0 victory at cross-town foes Lokomotiv. It was a five-star performance from a player who is lively, clever in his link-up play and devastating in his finishing.

Victor OSIMHEN



(Lille, Fra, & Nga)
The 21-year-old signed from Belgian side Charleroi in August has been an all-action revelation this term, not only scoring on demand in Ligue 1 but also on target in the Champions League against Chelsea and Valencia. He has had to scrap to get on in life, selling bottles of water as a youngster on the streets of his hometown Lagos.

TOMORROW'S STARS TODAY

Talentscout

SOUTH AMERICAN UNDER-23S

WORDS: Tim Vickery

Alexis MAC ALLISTER

(Brighton & Hove Albion, Eng, & Arg)
Attacking midfielder who faded towards the end of the recent South American Under-23 Championship in Colombia, from which Argentina and Brazil qualified for the Tokyo Olympics, but was still the best player on show. Strikes the ball with real venom – his set-pieces were superb – and is a threat from open play. Has an eye for a pass as well as the gift of timing his runs into the box to perfection. Despite a lack of physicality, he was forever popping up beyond the centre- forward. Was parked at Boca Juniors before he got a work permit for England. Has played for Argentina's seniors – as did his father Carlos, a left-back – and has two brothers at Argentinos Juniors, his first club.

Yeferson SOTELDO

(Santos, Bra, & Ven)
One of the 2017 under-20 side who has kept making progress. Tiny winger whose low centre of gravity and dribbling skills make him a challenge for any marker. A star in Brazilian football and part of his country's hopes of reaching the next World Cup.

Julian ALVAREZ

(River Plate & Arg)
A striker in the mold of former Brazil star Bebeto, he is mobile, intelligent, two-footed and full of splendid combination play. His main problem could be finding a space where his talents can bloom since he is especially well suited to the second striker role in a 4-4-2.

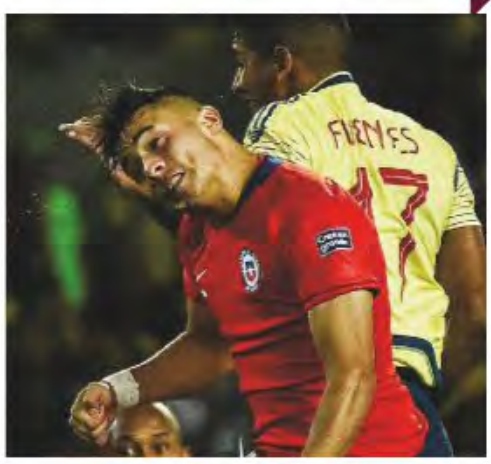
Jorge CARRASCAL

(River Plate, Arg, & Col)
Buckled in the end under the strain of carrying an ordinary team on home ground, but produced some lovely moments along the way. Attacking midfielder with delightfully quick feet and a rapier shot. At 21 he has already played in four different countries: Colombia, Spain, Ukraine and now, since the summer, Argentina.

Fernando PACHECO

(Fluminense, Bra, & Per)
Carried the fight bravely in all his side's games. Strong, long-striding attacking midfielder who made surging runs down both flanks. With Sporting Cristal since the age of 14, he won two league titles with the Peruvian club but is now bound for Brazil. The question is, has the move come too early?

Nicolas DIAZ



(Palestino & Chl)
Left-footed centre-back who formed an excellent combination with Nico Rodriguez in a side that kept three clean sheets in four games. Quick and neat, though his lack of height could mean that his long-term future is at left-back. His father and older brother are both Chile internationals.

PAULINHO

(Bayer Leverkusen, Ger, & Bra)
Support striker who was mainly used cutting in from wide on the left. Strong, quick, direct and uncomplicated, the best news from this tournament was that his left foot has developed since leaving Vasco da Gama. Has struggled for game time since moving to Germany in July 2018 but the 19-year-old's talent cannot be ignored.

Bruno GUIMARAES

(Lyon, Fra, & Bra)
Central midfielder who is confident on the ball and has a strong personality. Versatile, he can tackle hard and has a good range of passing, including subtle defence-splitting balls. Left Athletico Paranaense to move to France, where he may have to work hard on his left foot.

Matheus CUNHA

(Hertha Berlin, Ger, & Bra)
Arrived at the tournament low on confidence after a difficult few months at RB Leipzig – who he has since left for Hertha – but came good towards the end of the competition and finished as the top scorer with five goals. Rangy figure who can finish off either foot and in the air, and whose build-up play got better as well.

Manuel UGARTE

(Fenix & Uru)
Looks like a real find. Won his place during the competition and instantly improved the team. Holding midfielder who reads the game with impressive maturity and possesses quality on the ball. Still only 18, he is young enough for next year's under-20s. Made his professional debut for Fenix at the age of 15.

Glenn Moore

Late flowering in Scotland

Recognition for the team of 1972 and high hopes for domestic game

Fame came late in the day for Rose Reilly, Scotland's only World Cup winner – who was victorious when playing for Italy in 1984 – but the pioneer will complete a move from anonymity to centre stage when a play about her life travels her home nation in April.

The production of *Rose* is another indication of the belated flowering of the women's game north of Hadrian's Wall. Reilly, 65, has been inducted into the Scottish Football Hall of Fame and in January was made an MBE in The Queen's New Year Honours List.

But as a player she was banned for life by the Scottish FA for pursuing a professional career overseas and only last year did she receive her cap for representing Scotland in their first international, in 1972. The decades-long delay was because the SFA refused to recognise the match as women's football was banned in Scotland until 1974.

Long after the ban was lifted misogynistic attitudes persisted. As recently as 2013 a well-known media figure described the sport as "a turgid spectacle" and suggested Motherwell's Fir Park home should be "torched to cleanse the stadium after it played host to women's football – face it folks, nobody cares."

However, those comments met strong criticism and in recent years there has been a change in attitude. Government pressure and funding has helped – First Minister Nicola Sturgeon presented Reilly and colleagues with their cap – but the main driver has been the performances of Rose's successors.

Last summer Scotland's women became the first Scots team of either gender to reach a World Cup since 1998. This followed on from being the first to reach a European Championship finals, in 2017, since the men in 1996.

Success has created a surge in support. In May a record 18,555 watched at Hampden Park as Shelley Kerr's team beat Jamaica.

Scottish men's football is dominated by the Old Firm, their support founded on centuries-old religious rivalry. Protestants affiliate with Rangers, Catholics with Celtic. But in the women's game the team that has held sway for more than a decade is an independent non-partisan side. Glasgow City, founded in 1998 by players Laura Montgomery and Carol Anne Stewart, who are still involved, have won the last 13 titles.

> As recently as 2013 a well-known media figure suggested Motherwell's Fir Park home should be "torched to cleanse the stadium after it played host to women's football"

For years, frustrated by the slow progress of the Scottish game, they looked covetously south, only for the FA to rebuff their plea to join the WSL. Now, though, they will finally have competition at home from the Old Firm.

Both Celtic and Rangers have been around for more than a decade but their sole silverware has been the League Cup won by Celtic in 2010. Hibernian, from Edinburgh, have been Glasgow City's main rivals in recent years.

Rangers, who first fielded a women's team in 2008, have gone full-time and are intent on making an impact. Former Liverpool and Rangers defender Gregory Vignal has been appointed joint head coach with Malky Thomson, with 15 players released and a new squad recruited. Among the arrivals are goalkeeper Jenna Fife from Hibs and Kirsten Reilly from WSL's Bristol City.

There have also been the eye-catching arrivals of Canadian-born Venezuela international Sonia O'Neill from Fleury 91, in France, and 29-year-old forward Bala Devi, who has scored 52 goals in 58 internationals and becomes the first professional Indian female footballer.

Celtic, who tried to sign the young Reilly in the 1960s, only to withdraw their offer when they realised she was a girl, founded their women's team in 2007. The club seemed happy to let it tick modestly over until the humiliation of a 9-0 defeat by Hibernian in the 2018 League Cup Final seemed to prompt a re-think. They have also gone full-time and appointed Fran Alonso, a former coach to Lewes women and previously on the senior staff at Everton and Southampton men.

The Spaniard will not have to wait long to gauge his squad's ability: they start the campaign on February 23

Honoured...Rose Reilly (right) with Nicola Sturgeon

Old Firm...Rangers (in blue) and Celtic

against Glasgow City. The champions were surprisingly beaten 4-1 by Celtic last season, their only league defeat, so will be keen to reaffirm their standing at home. Coached by former Aberdeen striker Scott Booth they need to find form swiftly ahead of a demanding European Champions League quarter-final against Wolfsburg.

Rangers open against promoted Hearts, another club showing signs of greater commitment. The other four clubs in the Scottish Women's Premier League are Hibs, runners-up for the last five seasons but in a state of flux after losing several players and coach Grant Scott, fellow Edinburgh club Spartans, Motherwell and Forfar Framlington. Six of the eight have new coaches, with Booth and Spartans' Debbi McCulloch – the league's one female coach – the survivors.

The personnel changes are illustrative of what would appear to be a game on the cusp of major development. There is speculation that a strategic review of the women's game will recommend the men's Scottish Premier Football League takes over running the SWPL. Not everyone will welcome this but greater resources are needed. The 10-0 win over Motherwell with which Glasgow City sealed last season's title was played on a public park with facilities more akin to Sunday League than a national league.

"Just won a league title in a public park at a sports centre," tweeted Scotland international Hayley Lauder. "Not how I envisaged the game in 2019." WS

Round-up

Injured...Ada Hegerberg

HEGERBERG OUT FOR THE SEASON

Lyon's Ada Hegerberg, the Champions League record goalscorer, will miss the rest of the season after suffering a ruptured anterior cruciate ligament. The 24-year-old Norwegian will at least be back – unlike Tabea Kemme, who has retired at 28 due to a knee injury. The Arsenal midfielder won Olympic gold with Germany in 2016.

On the move... Caitlin Foord (left)

VIRUS FORCES SWITCH

The coronavirus outbreak prompted a switch in venue for the Asian 2020 Olympic third round qualifiers. Group B was originally set to take place in Wuhan, the city where coronavirus began, before being switched to Nanjing and then moved to Sydney.

China were forced to travel without Wang Shuang and Yao Wei who were trapped in Wuhan. On arrival the team were quarantined in their hotel, further delaying the start of the group which also includes Thailand, Taiwan/Chinese Taipai and Australia. Group A had been reduced to hosts South Korea, Vietnam and Myanmar after North Korea withdrew.

New role... Eni Aluko

Trapped... Wang Shuang

MATILDAS FOLLOW KERR'S PATH TO EUROPE

Several Australian internationals are following Sam Kerr's lead in moving to the WSL.

Hayley Raso has joined Everton, while Chloe Logarzo went to Bristol City and Caitlin Foord signed for Arsenal. All three had previously combined playing in America and Australia.

Foord, who had been on loan to Sydney, was recently traded from Portland Thorns to Orlando, although she did not make a single appearance for the Floridian club.

Meanwhile, teenage striker Mary Fowler has reportedly left Adelaide United for French side Montpellier.

ALUKO TAKES EXECUTIVE ROLE

Eni Aluko announced her retirement and has become women's sporting director at Aston Villa, in her home city of Birmingham. Second-tier Villa are favourites for promotion to the WSL.

Now 32, Aluko won 102 caps and scored 33 goals for England. She moved to Italy in 2018 and left Juventus in November.

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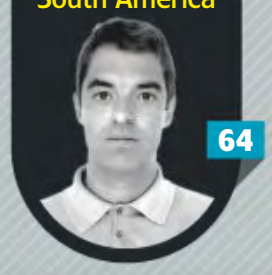

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USA: MLS

PAUL GARDNER

Celebrating a quarter century

Season kicks off with new teams in Miami and Nashville

Preview

Star... Javier Hernandez

For MLS, 2020 marks a 25th season – which is quite an achievement in the US, where professional soccer's history is strewn with the corpses of leagues that didn't make it.

Even the vaunted North American Soccer League – the league of Pele and Franz Beckenbauer – lasted only 17 years, from 1968 to 1984. But MLS is doing more than survive, it is expanding.

The 2020 season will see the addition of Inter Miami and Nashville, bringing MLS up to 26 teams, with more clubs on the way to what is considered the minimum of 30 – which is half as big again as most of the world's top leagues. A large-size league is necessary for national coverage of the USA's vast area.

It is a measure of MLS success that those next four slots have already been assigned to Austin and Charlotte (to join in 2021) and St Louis and Sacramento (2022). Commissioner Don Garber has let it be known that "32 teams will happen at some point but it is not happening any time soon".

The growing strength of MLS is reflected in what it charges cities to purchase a franchise. Where Toronto paid $10million to join the league in 2006, the franchise fee has now risen to over $200m.

That figure came up recently in a hearing before the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS). Two small, second-tier American clubs were suing FIFA, CONCACAF and the United States Federation, alleging that FIFA was acting against its own regulations in allowing clubs to buy their way in with a franchise payment into MLS. They claimed that FIFA regulations demanded instead a promotion and relegation system.

CAS disagreed and ruled that, for the United States at least, the franchise system was fine.

So MLS, unlike other top leagues, will continue to operate without promotion and relegation. Another huge difference is that MLS, using what is known as a "single-entity" structure, closely controls how much money its clubs can spend. Player contracts all belong to MLS, not to individual clubs.

This unusual system has caused trouble in the past when it has been time – which is every four years – for the league and players union to sign a collective bargaining agreement. But not so this year when negotiations were completed three weeks before the deadline.

MLS agreed to increases in spending on player salaries: from $9,225,000 per club for 2020, rising each year to $11,643,000 in 2024. The minimum salary for a senior player, currently $70,250, will be increased yearly up to $85,500 in 2024. Agreement was also reached on assuring players a percentage of the increased money expected from new contracts with television companies, which is something also handled centrally by the league.

The franchise fee was not a problem for newcomers Inter Miami. After his five years playing with LA Galaxy, David Beckham was granted an option to purchase a franchise for $25m. He chose Miami as the city for his club, but it has taken six years for the club to be ready to play due to the problem of finding suitable land for a stadium.

The stadium has yet to be built but the site has been purchased. For at least one year, Inter Miami will be playing at the refurbished Lockhart stadium in Fort

Even the vaunted North American Soccer League – the league of Pele and Franz Beckenbauer – lasted only 17 years

First boss...Inter Miami's Diego Alonso

Veteran...Dax McCarty brings plenty of MLS experience to league newcomers Nashville

Lauderdale. The coach of the new team will be Uruguayan Diego Alonso, who moves from Mexico's Monterrey.

The selection of a Latin-American boss is significant. Miami has a huge Latin-American population and has been dubbed "South America North". And while not all – particularly the Cubans – are necessarily devoted to soccer, it is evidently felt that there is a large reservoir of fans waiting for a pro team.

Rumours of a major big-name signing have been circulating for the past year, but none has yet appeared. So far the trend for Inter Miami has been to sign promising Latino youngsters, including the highly-touted 19-year-old Argentinian midfielder Matias Pellegrini.

The other 2020 expansion team, Nashville, have been experiencing rather different stadium problems.

Their franchise was granted largely on the strength of guarantees that the mayor was giving strong support to plans to construct a new stadium. However, a scandal enveloped the mayor and forced her resignation – and the new mayor is a long-time opponent of the plan to build a new arena.

Nashville's most important signing to date has been 32-year-old Dax McCarty, a midfielder who brings 13 years of MLS experience with Dallas, DC United and New York Red Bulls. But most of their players are newcomers to MLS, as are most of Inter Miami's, and neither club looks capable of causing any upsets.

Atlanta United did shine as an expansion team in 2017, and won the league in 2018, but they faded last year. The departure of Tata Martinez to coach Mexico saw the arrival of Frank De Boer and a change in the team's personality from Latin sparkle to Dutch defensiveness. The Open Cup was won in 2019 but that was all and the hope of a return to the entertaining team of 2018 seems unlikely.

But entertaining Latin football will not be lacking in 2020 and it will most surely be played by Los Angeles FC, with the superb Mexican Carlos Vela and his scoring partner Uruguayan Diego Rossi.

Coach Bob Bradley has added more Latin talent in 21-year-old Uruguayan midfielder Francisco Ginella and Jose Cifuentes, a 20-year-old midfielder from Ecuador, leaving LAFC positioned as serious contenders for the MLS title.

LA Galaxy also have championship hopes and will be looking to avenge the 5-3 drubbing they took from LAFC in last year's semi-finals. Zlatan Ibrahimovic has gone and his remarkable goals – if not his self-admiration – will be missed. Even so, optimism is in the air as Galaxy have picked up Javier "Chicharito" Hernandez, the all-time leading scorer for Mexico with 52 goals who had an 11-year European career that included stints with Manchester United, West Ham United, Real Madrid and Bayer Leverkusen.

Hernandez's arrival at Galaxy has been called the most important MLS signing since David Beckham.

Latin players – Nicolas Lodeiro (Uruguay) and Raul Ruidiaz (Peru) – also played a big part in the Seattle Sounders' winning of the 2019 title. This year coach Brian Schmetzer has strengthened the team's Latin ties by signing Colombian defender Yeimar Gomez and Brazilian midfielder Joao Paulo. Add in the growing confidence of young American striker Jordan Morris and Seattle have hopes of becoming the first MLS team to successfully defend their title since Galaxy in 2012.

Toronto, despite finishing a lowly ninth in the overall 2019 standings, advanced through the play-offs to the Final. Even though that ended with a 3-1 loss to Seattle it was a remarkable achievement, though one they can hardly expect to repeat again as star players Michael Bradley (32), Jozy Altidore (30) and Pablo Piatti (30) aren't getting any younger. New blood is needed, but no

Temperamental ...Thierry Henry

Quality...Carlos Vela

Latino...Seattle Sounders midfielder Joao Paulo

important signings have been made.

The New York teams, Red Bulls and NYCFC, continue to promise much and achieve little.

The Bulls, formerly the MetroStars, were one of the founding teams back in 1996 but they have never won the title. They have now lost key striker Bradley Wright-Phillips who, after six years and 108 goals, departed as a free agent for LAFC and the Bulls appear to be banking on home-grown players coming up through their academy.

NYFC is yet another team with a stadium problem. They have spent their first five years as an MLS team playing home games at Yankee Stadium, which is an excellent modern facility but one designed for baseball. A soccer pitch does not fit easily into a baseball stadium as it is a yard or more too narrow, so some of the fans are seated at quite a distance from the field. However, a solution may be at hand if, as rumoured, a deal to build on land nearby has been reached. The site is ideal as it is in the Bronx, is part of New York City and it has a subway stop right next to it.

Gone...New York Red Bulls will have to make do without the goals of Bradley Wright-Phillips

Optimism is in the air at Galaxy due to the signing of Javier "Chicharito" Hernandez, the all-time leading scorer for Mexico with 52 goals

But NYCFC's frailties can hardly be blamed on the stadium problem. Results have been good, with the team finishing once in third place in the Eastern Conference, twice in second place, and, in 2019 in first place. But each year they have been knocked out of the championship race in the semi-finals. This is a team that was never quite good enough, that always had a weak link, and there is no reason for thinking things will be any better in 2020. New coach Ronny Deila seems a strange appointment in a league that until now has had virtually no Norwegian involvement.

The lack of major signings leaves about half of the MLS teams making only slight revisions in playing strength, which means there is little to suggest that such as Philadelphia, DC United, Dallas, Cincinnati, Colorado, Kansas, Columbus or Real Salt Lake can offer more than they did last time out, when none of them looked like a serious challenger.

Coaching, however, could make a difference at four clubs.

Bruce Arena has had a year at New England Revolution in which to shape a team to his liking so they should not be ruled out as potential champions.

At Houston, the new boss is Tab Ramos, who was one of the USA's most outstanding players between 1988 and 2002. Since 2009 he has been a US Soccer staff coach, mostly with the national under-20 team and – although at 53 he has left it rather late to join a pro team – his enthusiasm, knowledge of the game and ability to identify and get the best from skilled players may be just what Houston need to get back to winning ways.

At Montreal Impact a really big name has moved into the coaching position. Thierry Henry is no stranger to MLS, where he played for four-and-a-half seasons with the New York Red Bulls, but his short managerial career has not been a great success story, lasting only three months in his most recent job with Monaco. Montreal have shown a liking for skillful soccer, so Henry's declared wish to have his teams play like Pep Guardiola's Barcelona makes him a fitting choice. He will be the seventh Montreal coach in eight seasons, but the club has to know it is taking on a temperamental character.

At Chicago Fire the new man in charge is Raphael Wicky, and thereby hangs a curious tale. In March 2019, Wicky – a Swiss coach unknown to most Americans – was suddenly put in charge of the US under-17 team. In October of that year he led the team in a disastrous performance at the Under-17 World Cup in Brazil, where the USA were quickly eliminated after two losses and one draw. Barely two months later Wicky takes over at Chicago, who will be without former German international Bastian Schweinsteiger who has announced his retirement.

All of which leaves Los Angeles FC as the most likely winner of MLS Cup 2020. To succeed they must get another extraordinary season from Vela, who last year broke the MLS single-season scoring record with 34 goals. But if his 2020 season is half as good as 2019, it should also do the trick. WS

Copa Libertadores

TIM VICKERY

Preview

Flamengo go again

Jesus' men prepare to defend their South American title

LEADING CONTENDERS

The first Libertadores of the new decade will climax with a November 21 Final in Rio de Janeiro's Maracana stadium, the home ground of **Flamengo**, and the defending champions will certainly expect to be present on the big day.

Under Portuguese coach Jorge Jesus there is little sign of Fla resting on the laurels of a magical 2019. They can count on an array of attacking options, although the loss of Spanish centre-back Pablo Mari, who has joined Arsenal on loan, is a big blow. He made the high defensive line viable last year, but without him they could be vulnerable. Their group is far from easy, so there could be some early jitters.

While Flamengo are undoubtedly the team to beat, fellow Brazilians **Gremio** will be gunning for revenge after their semi-final humiliation last year. The 2017 winners are a well-run club and they have backed coach Renato Portaluppi, who has been allowed to strengthen the squad this year, with priority given to cup competitions.

Palmeiras may be the one club in South America capable of matching the financial resources of Flamengo, but they had a frustrating 2019. Having bucked the trend for foreign coaches in Brazil, they have put their faith in former national team and Real Madrid boss Vanderlei Luxemburgo who will be under pressure to produce results – and to do so in style.

Meanwhile, the long reign of Marcelo Gallardo continues at **River Plate**, who will be expected to lead the Argentinian challenge. Exequiel Palacios has joined Bayer Leverkusen and will be a major loss for the side that came within minutes of winning last year's title.

Slim chance... Hernan Crespo

Once again River must be considered contenders but they must be wary of repeating last term's slow start in a group that contains three former champions. They will not be helped by having to play their first two home games behind closed doors.

River's great rivals **Boca Juniors** appear to be in an easier group – which is just as well. While River are all about continuity, Boca are on their third coach in three years with the return of Miguel Angel Russo, who took them to the Libertadores title in 2007.

If there is to be a repeat then the team will have to grow during the competition, but Russo's task of finding a blend has been hampered by the loss of attacking midfielder Alexis Mac Allister, whose loan spell from Brighton & Hove Albion has finished.

THE NEXT RUNG

Some of the other Argentinian clubs would be very unlikely winners. **Defensa y Justica**, for example, lost coach Mariano Sosa who resigned in January in protest at player sales and was replaced by Hernan Crespo. The most likely other Argentinian contender are the current domestic champions, **Racing**. They also lost their coach, Eduardo Coudet, but Sebastian Beccacece, who is a former assistant to Jorge Sampaoli, is a fascinating replacement. Their group looks straightforward and they should be very watchable.

> While Flamengo are undoubtedly the team to beat, fellow Brazilians Gremio will be gunning for revenge

Sampaoli enjoyed a splendid year in Brazil with **Santos** but he has since moved on and veteran Portuguese coach Jesualdo Ferreira could find him a hard act to follow. While Sampaoli did wonders on a shoestring, Ferreira may have even less to work with, but at least his team are in one of the easier groups.

Coudet, meanwhile, has gone to Brazil to take over at **Internacional**, a club striving to improve on last year's mediocrity. They will have had to negotiate two qualifying rounds to make the group stage, but if successful they will find themselves up against local rivals Gremio.

The will be aware, however, that progression may not be straightforward, as fellow Brazilian giants Corinthians discovered. With the club's recent style of play having become somewhat sterile, they appointed Tiago Nunes as coach in the hope that he could come up with something more expansive. But leading 2-0 at home to Paraguayan side Guarani in the second qualifying stage, they conceded a second-half goal to draw 2-2 on aggregate and go out on away goals.

Losing Nunes was a blow to **Athletico Paranaense**, an ambitious club who won the Copa Sudamericana in 2018 and now have their sights set on the Libertadores, although this year would appear to find them in a state of transition. There will be more pressure

Interesting... Independiente del Valle won last year's Copa Sudamericana

Humiliation...Flamengo (in red) thrashed Gremio 6-1 on aggregate last year

on **Sao Paulo**, who as a result of their triumphs in the early 1990s have a special bond with this competition. Much will be expected of coach Fernando Diniz and his mix of veterans such as Dani Alves and the club's latest youth products.

INTERESTING OUTSIDERS

Since the Libertadores became a year-long competition in 2017, Brazil and Argentina have supplied all but five of the 24 quarter-finalists, but 2008 champions **LDU** of Ecuador reached the last eight a few months ago. Pablo Repetto's team do not look as strong this year but they remain dangerous, especially at home.

LDU's neighbours **Independiente del Valle** are interesting outsiders. A tiny club that focuses on youth development, they outplayed all comers on the way to winning last year's Sudamericana, and it will be fascinating to see if they can show the same form in the Libertadores.

A country that consistently punches above its weight is Paraguay. Daniel

Hopes...Penarol (left, in yellow) and Nacional

Garnero's **Olimpia** have been the dominant domestic force and veteran striker Roque Santa Cruz will hope to carry his superb recent form into the competition. **Libertad** are also consistent Libertadores performers and under the vastly experienced Ramon Diaz they will have their sights set high.

Colombia were the last country to break the Argentina/Brazil monopoly, and they have a couple of interesting representatives. **Junior** of Barranquilla have been the dominant domestic club for a while, without being able to make an impression on the Libertadores, but maybe this will be their year. And **America** of Cali are back for the first time since 2009 after Costa Rican coach Alexandre Guimaraes took them to the domestic title.

THE REST

There will be plenty of interest in Diego Forlan's coaching debut with **Penarol** of Uruguay, but local rivals **Nacional** ended last year as the stronger of the two and would seem to be in an easier group.

There are hopes that **Universidad Catolica** might be the best side to come out of Chile in a while. They have lost coach Gustavo Quinteros to Tijuana of Mexico, though Argentina's Ariel Holan is an intriguing replacement.

While Chilean clubs have only managed to qualify one team from the group phase in the last five years, in the case of Peru it is one in nine, and one in 10 for Venezuela.

But with factors such as altitude always a consideration when teams travel to La Paz in Bolivia, the Libertadores always has potential for an upset. WS

Japan: J1 League

MIKE PLASTOW

Champions' stiff challenge

Yokohama F-Marinos face fierce competition from big guns this season

The new J.League season kicked off in February with Yokohama F-Marinos defending their first J.League title in 15 years and FC Tokyo, the club they pipped at the post last time out, drawing ever closer to a long-awaited maiden championship success.

Kawasaki Frontale, champions in 2018 and League Cup winners last year, and Kashima Antlers, Japan's most-crowned club, were also both itching for the restart after slipping up by their own high standards in the league last term.

The J.League's biggest spenders, Vissel Kobe, look as though they could be back on course for their aim of becoming "Asia's Number One Club" after beating Kashima 2-0 in the Emperor's Cup Final – a victory that secured a first-ever bite at the Asian Champions League this year.

J.League attendances were better than ever last season with the aggregate figure reaching a record 11,415,463 and the top-flight average topping 20,000. The money also continues to poor in from the DAZN broadcasting contract, while the transfer of international rights to Dentsu should produce a wider global access to J.League highlights.

This will also be the first season of full VAR at all top-tier games. In spite of the controversies elsewhere, the Japanese – who like to get things right – have rushed it into place ahead of the original schedule following some high-profile refereeing errors last season in matches where the test VAR system

Success...Vissel Kobe's Kyogo Furuhashi (in red) in the Emperor's Cup Final

Preview

Close...F-Marinos' Teruhito Nakagawa (in blue) and Kento Hashimoto of Tokyo finished first and second last season

was not being used.

The talent drain, however, has not only continued but sped up among the country's top young players, led last year by Takefusa Kubo's move from Tokyo to Real Madrid and Hiroki Abe going from Kashima to Barcelona. It has now become so normal for the J.League's top clubs to lose their best young players that the 2020 Tokyo Olympic squad will probably consist mainly of youngsters now playing in Europe.

For Ange Postecoglou, starting his third season in charge of F-Marinos, the key challenge is how to maintain the extraordinary run-in to the title that saw his side win 10 and draw one of their final 11 league games. Wide attacker Mateus returned to Nagoya Grampus at the end of his loan but otherwise the same squad is largely in place, with the interesting additions of striker Ado Onaiwu from Urawa Red Diamonds and right-winger Kota Mizunuma – the son of former Nissan and Marinos great Takashi Mizunuma – from Cerezo Osaka. Onaiwu, who has a Japanese mother and Nigerian father, was called up in November and a first Japan cap may not be far away.

Tokyo, who led for most of the last campaign only to fade at the finish, are also looking settled under Kenta Hasegawa, who is starting his third season in charge. While the side's Japanese players remain more or less the same, there has been significant turnover among the foreigners. Tokyo have turned to experienced players from other J.League clubs, bringing

Veteran...Kazuyoshi Miura is back at 52

in midfielders Adailton from Jubilo Iwata and Leandro from Kashima, and Lebanon centre-back Joan Oumari from Kobe. The players leaving are on-loan Nattawut Suksum who returns to Bangkok United, Jael Ferreira who goes on loan to Matsumoto Yamaga, Yu In-soo who moves to Seongnam in South Korea and Oh Jae-suk who returns to Gamba Osaka after his loan spell.

While Tokyo and F-Marinos both lost use of their home stadiums to the Rugby World Cup last year, Tokyo will face the same temporary eviction order again this year on account of the Olympic Games. For better or for worse, Tokyo will have eight consecutive away games in the league from June to late August.

Kashima Antlers start 2020 under a new coach, Antonio Carlos Zago, following the departure of Go Oiwa. Capped by Brazil, Zago played a year in Japan for Kashiwa Reysol in the 1990s but is best remembered for his five-year spell at Roma, during which he spat in the face of Lazio's Diego Simeone in the derby game, giving rise to the immortal call: "Zago spits fire like a dragon!"

Zago is looking forward to working with Kashima's technical director Zico, who himself is remembered in Japan for, among other things, notoriously spitting on the ball to protest a penalty in the J.League's inaugural season.

Kashima's main pre-season signings were defenders Tatsuki Nara from Kawasaki Frontale, Japan international Daiki Sugioka from Shonan Bellmare and Rikuto Hirose from F-Marinos. They will, however, miss the creative Brazilian midfielder Serginho who has joined Changchun Yatai in China.

Kawasaki Frontale are standing by their 2019 squad despite failing to make it three J.League titles in a row but they do have one promising new signing in striker Reo Hatate, who makes a permanent move from Juntendo University. He has played for Japan at junior level and is hoping to make his mark at the 2020 Olympic Games.

Vissel Kobe have said goodbye to David Villa (retired), Lukas Podolski (Antalyaspor in Turkey), Wellington (released), Oumari (Tokyo) and Mike Havenaar (released). But that still leaves boss Thorsten Fink able to call upon the services of such players as Andres Iniesta, Thomas Vermaelen, Sergi Samper, Dankler and the excellent close-season signing Douglas, a prolific striker from Shimizu S-Pulse.

This will be the first season of full VAR at all top-tier games...following some high-profile refereeing errors last season

Urawa Reds, finalists in last year's Asian Champions League but caught up in the relegation battle at home, have mostly kept faith with their squad but also brought in Brazilian striker Leonardo, who scored 28 goals in 38 league games last year for second-tier Albirex Niigata, and the Kenya-born Australia under-23 captain Thomas Deng from Melbourne Victory.

There is no denying that there will also be much media interest in 52-year old Kazuyoshi Miura, who now returns to the top flight with promoted Yokohama FC for the first time since 2007.

"Kazu" isn't expected to see much action this season, although he did make three brief appearances in the second tier last year and will surely extend his own longevity record very early on in the new campaign. WS

JANUARY 16-FEBRUARY 13, 2020

Global diary

A comprehensive record of recent events around the world

Thursday January 16

INDIA: India's oldest team, Mohun Bagan, will merge with another Kolkata-based side, ATK, and play in the Indian Super League next season. Bagan are currently top of the rival I-League, which they have won four times, but club general secretary Swapan Sadhan Bose says: "As much as we want the romance of the maroon-and-green jersey and it's 130-year-old tradition to continue, there comes a time when romance almost invariably requires a partner named practicality." Officials reveal that the name of the new merged club will have elements of both sides when launched in June.

Friday January 17

CYPRUS: All league games are suspended this coming weekend as referees protest at bomb damage to an official's car in Larnaca. The Cyprus Football Association describe the attack on Andreas Constantinou's vehicle as an "act of terrorism".

PORTUGAL: Benfica beat Lisbon rivals Sporting 2-0 to set a new Primeira Liga record of 17 away wins on the trot. Substitute Rafa Silva gets both goals and now has 11 in his last 13 league games.

QATAR: Al Sadd win the Qatar Cup for a seventh time, beating Al Duhail 4-0 in the Final with goals from Nam Tae-hee, Baghdad Bounedjah (two) and Akram Afif.

UAE: Al Nasr beat holders and city rivals Shabab Al Ahli 2-1 in the UAE League Cup Final.

Saturday January 18

GERMANY: Signed from Red Bull Salzburg for €20m, 19-year-old Erling Haaland comes off the bench with his new side trailing 3-1 at Augsburg and scores a hat-trick in 23 minutes as Borussia Dortmund win 5-3. "I am pretty relaxed about it, I don't really know why," says Haaland. "I'm at a fantastic club with great team-mates and good people around me. I came here to score goals and it was a good debut for me."

Sunday January 19

CYPRUS: Police arrest a 30-year-old player in connection with a probe into alleged match-fixing in Cyprus' second-tier league and cup games.

FRANCE: Souleymane Camara sets a new club record with his 430th appearance for Montpellier when he appears as sub in a 5-0 win over Caen in the Coupe de France.

Monday January 20

BRAZIL: Real Madrid sign 18-year-old Brazilian midfielder Reinier from Flamengo for €30m.

ITALY: After being fined €20,000 and having a section of their Stadio Olimpico stands closed after their supporters made fascist salutes during a Europa League game against Rennes, Lazio contact individual supporters demanding that they pay the club €50,000 in damages. In a letter to those the club has managed to identify, Lazio president Claudio Lotito writes: "Quite apart from the penal aspects of your behaviour, this also inflicted serious economic damage on the club, which between missed ticket sales and the fine, counts for at least €50,000." He went on to add: "As only the fans identified are responsible for the damage to the club, we invite you to contact us so that you can agree a method of payment to reimburse Lazio."

Record breakers...Benfica (in red) beat Lisbon rivals Sporting to set a new Portuguese league best of 17 consecutive away wins

Tuesday January 21

RUSSIA: Alexander Kokorin, who was released from jail in September but has not played since rejoining Zenit, signs for relegation-threatened Sochi on loan until the end of the season. He served almost a year in prison after he assaulted the chauffeur of a TV presenter and two government officials during a drunken night out.

SPAIN: Former Osasuna director Angel Vizcay tells a judge the club made payments to opposition players to fix games in an attempt to keep Osasuna in La Liga. They escaped relegation in 2013 but finally went down in 2014.

Wednesday January 22

FIFA: A record £5.6billion was spent in 2019 on transfers in men's football according to a FIFA report,

Victorious ...Al Sadd

which is an increase of more than 5.8 per cent on the previous year. English clubs were the biggest spenders with £1.5bn.

Friday January 24

CYPRUS: The car of Aris Limassol president Yiannakis Panayi, whose side are top of the Second Division, is damaged in a bomb attack at his home. It is unknown if the incident is related to Aris being involved in one of the four second-tier matches being investigated for suspicious betting activity.

GERMANY: Erling Haaland makes it five goals in two games, scoring twice more as a sub as Borussia Dortmund beat Cologne 5-1.

Saturday January 25

CAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE: With a 2-2 draw at home to Moroccan side Raja, Esperance set a new record in the competition of 20 games without defeat.

ITALY: Torino concede seven ➤

Unbeaten...Esperance (red and yellow)

Gambia

STEVE MENARY

Packed...fans flocked to the game against Algeria in 2018

Tom Saintfiet's latest challenge

Belgian coach eyes progress for West Africans

Despite twice winning the Africa Under-17 Cup of Nations and beating Brazil 3-1 at the Under-17 World Cup in 2005, until last year Gambia had not won a competitive away game at senior level. But under Tom Saintfiet all that is changing.

After an impressive 3-1 win in Angola gave his team a flying start in the 2021 AFCON qualifiers, the Belgian coach says: "Before I came the team had not won a senior match in five years. When I came I made discipline on the pitch so the players understand what they need to get results."

Such performances are finally getting the locals behind their national team and a crowd of 40,000 – the biggest for a game in the country – crammed into the 25,000-capacity Independence Stadium for a 1-1 draw with Algeria in September 2018.

"This is our time," says defender Pa Modou Jagne. "Tactically, we are more disciplined and everyone is sticking to the game plan we are given. Before it was not like that."

Jagne, who is with Zurich in Switzerland, is one of more than 60 Gambians playing in Europe, while not a single player in Saintfiet's squad plays domestically. The coach explains: "Players get $40 to $50 a month in the Gambian league, which only runs from December to April. It's very difficult to live on that so if you can live from football you go abroad."

Just getting a contract abroad is viewed as an achievement and many do not push on to match such as Jagne, who has carved out a decade long-career in Switzerland.

Mattar M'Boge, who is coach of Gambia's under-17 and under-20 teams, says: "There is a mentality of our players that once they are on $5,000 a month or whatever they have made it. Some players like Pa Modou push themselves to the highest level but a lot don't."

Saintfiet marshals his team based on resources, and his style of playing deep and hitting opponents on the counter-attack has brought some impressive results. A 1-0 friendly win away to Morocco in June was followed by the victory in Angola and a 2-2 draw with DR Congo that put Gambia on top of their AFCON 2021 qualifying group. However, not everyone likes their team's style of football.

"The public want us to play attacking football like Barcelona," says M'Boge. "Tom has been criticised for playing counter-attacking football but he wants to get us qualified. The tactics suit the team."

Gambia have never qualified for a senior AFCON tournament and M'Boge has no doubt that qualifying for next year's finals in Cameroon would be profound, adding: "People think there is a curse, that we will never get to an AFCON, but if they can turn on the TV and see our team at an AFCON it will change everyone's mentality."

Gambia's destiny will be decided by home and away qualifiers with Gabon in March. "We need three points and have the chance to get the results but it won't be easy," says the much-travelled Saintfiet who, after often brief appointments elsewhere, is relishing the challenge with Gambia. WS

➤ goals at home in Serie A for the first time, losing 7-0 to Atalanta.
PORTUGAL: Ricardo Horta gets a late winner as Braga beat Porto 1-0 to win the Taca da Liga Final.

Sunday January 26

CHINA: Group B of the Asian Women's Olympic qualifiers in February is moved to Australia from Wuhan, following the outbreak of Coronavirus. The previous day's Super Cup game between Guangzhou Evergrande and Shanghai Shenhua was postponed.
ITALY: Lazio's club record 11-match winning run ends with a 1-1 draw against city rivals Roma.

Wednesday January 29

ENGLAND: Everton turn down an offer of £85m from Barcelona for Brazilian striker Richarlison.

Thursday January 30

CHINA: The Chinese Football Association postpones all domestic football due to the rapidly spreading coronavirus which has killed up to 170 people so far, with 7,711 confirmed cases of infection.

Friday January 31

ENGLAND: Only £25m is spent by Premier League clubs on transfer deadline day – the lowest figure since 2010.

Saturday February 1

GERMANY: Borussia Dortmund beat Union Berlin 5-0 with two more goals from Erling Haaland who has now got seven in his three games for the club.
WALES: Connah's Quay Nomads beat Cymru South side STM Sports 3-0 in the Welsh League Cup Final to secure a place in next season's Scottish Challenge Cup.

Sunday February 2

ITALY: With two penalties in Juventus' 3-0 victory over Fiorentina, Cristiano Ronaldo is on target for a ninth successive Serie A game and takes his tally to 10 goals in his last six appearances.
SPAIN: Fuenlabrada midfielder Cristobal Marquez is sent off twice in his side's 2-0 defeat against Girona in the second tier. Shown a straight red card for a high challenge, he walked off the pitch, only to be called back when the referee looked at the pitchside monitor and changed his decision to a yellow. However, before play could restart Cristobal got into a confrontation with Girona's Alex Granell and both players were ➤

Ecuador

TIM VICKERY

Gambling on Jordi Cruyff

Federation hoping coach will boost World Cup qualifying campaign

The numbers do not lie. Since South America introduced its marathon World Cup qualification programme in 1996, Ecuador have picked up a total of 112 points at home but just 36 away. And the contrast is especially stark in the last two successful campaigns, those of 2006 and 2014, where the team made it to Germany and Brazil. In 2006 the split of points won home and away was 23-5. In 2014 it was 22-3.

Underpinning this, of course, is the phenomenon of altitude, with Ecuador playing their home games at Quito, some 2,800 metres above sea level.

While this may not present the difficulties of La Paz in Bolivia, which is around 800m higher, the statistics surely bear out the fact that Quito is a cause of discomfort for the unacclimatised visitor.

Some feel the effects more than others, but the overall consequence is that the lack of oxygen in the air reduces a player's athletic capacity to run as hard and as often. And then there is the effect on the ball, which, suffering less resistance, flies through the air quicker, giving extra potency to long shots and providing problems for goalkeepers.

> "You don't really imagine how much of a difference it makes...and this is an important advantage that we have"
> Jordi Cruyff on playing at altitude

There are also problems for coaches who are not used to the conditions – such as Jordi Cruyff, the new choice to take charge of Ecuador's national team.

"It is one thing to read about the effects of altitude," said the Dutchman after being presented to the media. "But you don't really imagine how much of a difference it makes. And I've noted it over the last few days. Now I can understand the effects it has on a player who is not adapted to the conditions, and this is an important advantage that we have."

It is a very revealing quote and one that makes it quite clear that Cruyff is diving into the deep end.

The next version of South America's fiercely competitive World Cup qualification campaign kicks off in March and, for all the glory of his name, Cruyff is a rookie boss. The 46-year-old's experience is restricted to quick spells in Israel and China, but he now steps up to a level at which almost everything is unknown. Even he cannot know for sure if he is good enough. He will not know a great deal about the players at his disposal, or their opponents, and only now is he discovering the terrain of battle.

He does, however, have some interesting raw material to work with.

Although Ecuador lost all four games at the recent continental under-23 championship without scoring a goal, there are some promising players coming

Future...Ecuador finished third at the Under-17 World Cup in June

through – graduates of last year's under-20 side who won the South American title and went on to finish third in the World Cup at that level. And Cruyff has been pleasantly surprised by the quality of Ecuadorian players, seizing onto a defining characteristic.

"They have great physical potential," he says. "They are athletic and dynamic."

Indeed, this has been a defining trait in Ecuadorian football, where for all their financial problems, the country's clubs have regularly punched above their weight in continental competitions. In the last five years a total of six Ecuadorian clubs have made it out of the group phase of the Copa Libertadores. Only Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay can boast better.

Learning curve...new boss Jordi Cruyff

The Ecuadorian game is based on quick transitions to athletic wingers. Some of this has to do with the characteristics of the players; some with altitude and the desire to force opponents to run as much as possible.

This, of course, is a very different style of play from that which is so associated with the Cruyff name – and it is hard to see how Jordi would have landed the job if his surname was different.

But opportunity has come his way and it will be fascinating to see what he does with it. WS

AFC Champions League

JOHN DUERDEN

Chinese football in lockdown

Coronavirus wreaks havoc with sporting calendar

Last year's AFC Champions League ended badly for East Asia with the title going to a team from the west of the continent, Al Hilal of Saudi Arabia, for only the second time since 2005. That, however, is nothing compared to how the 2020 version has started for the region.

Due to the coronavirus that originated in the Chinese city of Wuhan in December and spread around the country and elsewhere, the four Chinese teams were conspicuous by their absence when the continental tournament kicked off in February, with Shanghai Shenhua, Guangzhou Evergrande, Shanghai SIPG and Beijing Guoan all on extended training camps following the postponement of the Chinese Super League, which had been due to start on February 22.

While the Chinese FA has just one country to worry about, the Asian Football Confederation has been working hard to try to keep the Champions League going.

As the virus started to make headlines, Shanghai SIPG's play-off qualifier at home to Buriram United was played behind closed doors, despite requests from the Thai club for a switch to a neutral country. On the scoresheet in SIPG's 3-0 win was Austrian striker Marko Arnautovic, who has looked good in pre-season after struggling during his first few months in China following a big-money move last summer from West Ham United.

The next day, as the virus situation grew more serious, the AFC told Chinese clubs that their first three group games would be played away from home in the hope that, by match day four in April, the situation would be under control.

However, the day after that, with Shanghai SIPG and Shanghai Shenhua due to head to Australia to face Sydney and Perth Glory respectively in the opening round of games, this solution was already impossible. The Australian government announced that flights from the Chinese mainland would not be allowed to enter the country and that was that. Shortly afterwards, Thailand said the same.

An emergency meeting was held in Kuala Lumpur with officials from Australia, China and elsewhere trying to find a solution. In the end it was announced that the first three games involving Chinese teams in all four of the eastern groups – the tournament is divided into east and west geographic zones until the Final – would be postponed.

Games involving teams from South Korea, Australia, Japan, Thailand and Malaysia would go ahead, but the games involving Chinese teams would be rescheduled for April and May. The second round, which is a knockout stage featuring 16 teams, is a two-leg affair and is due to start in June. The AFC has its fingers crossed that this will go ahead as normal.

AFC general-secretary Windsor John says: "We came together in difficult circumstances to find solutions to allow us to play football while ensuring we protect the safety and security of all players, officials, stakeholders and fans. We also accept that this coronavirus is a

> "This coronavirus is a much bigger issue than just football"
> AFC general-secretary Windsor John

Impressive... Shanghai SIPG's Marko Arnautovic beats the Buriram United goalkeeper

Protection...medical team at Shanghai SIPG's game against Buriram United

much bigger issue than just football and we wish all those who have been affected a speedy return to health."

This was not the first meeting held by the AFC in regard to this year's Champions League as there have also been headaches in the western half of the draw.

Saudi Arabia and Iran are the two powerhouses of West Asian football but, due to the absence of diplomatic relations, their clubs played each other at neutral venues in 2019, depriving the competition of what would have been some of its biggest attendances.

This year it had been hoped that things would be different – until the US government drone strike near Baghdad International Airport in early January which killed top Iranian general Qasem Soleimani put paid to that. When Tehran hit back with missile strikes against targets in Iraq, Iran's neighbours talked of security concerns and there were reports that all four Iranian teams would have to play all their home games in neutral countries.

These rumours provoked fury in Tehran, with the Iranian Football Federation threatening a complete withdrawal. In response, the AFC said that Iranian teams could play their three away games first and the situation will be looked at again in April.

That remains to be seen but, for now, things appear to be holding together.

There are always issues in Asian football due to its size, its diversity and its geopolitical rivalries, and the presence of so many of the world's "hot spots" means that AFC officials need to be well informed, sensitive and constantly on their toes.

The coronavirus is a bigger threat than most and, at the moment, just being able to complete the group stage on time will be a major success and will be greeted with a sigh of relief. WS

➤ subsequently booked – resulting in Cristobal heading down the tunnel for a second time.

Monday February 3

ITALY: Gian Piero Gasperini is voted Serie A's coach of the year by his fellow bosses after guiding Atalanta to a third-place finish last season and a spot in the Champions League for the first time in their history. Bologna's Sinisa Mihajlovic is second with Massimiliano Allegri third after leading Juventus to the Italian title.

Tuesday February 4

GERMANY: Giovanni Reyna is on target for Borussia Dortmund in their 3-2 DFB-Pokal defeat by Werder Bremen and, at 17 years and 82 days, is the youngest scorer in the competition's history.
SPAIN: Reports claim second-tier Malaga could be relegated due to their dire financial situation. It is said La Liga may force administration upon the club and that would see them demoted from the Segunda.

Wednesday February 5

KENYA: FIFA issues a life ban to Ugandan player George Mandela for his involvement in "match manipulation" while with Kenyan club Kakamega Homeboyz. Team-mates Moses Chikati, Festus Okiring and Festo Omukoto are all handed four-year bans.

Thursday February 6

ENGLAND: Premier League clubs vote to bring the summer transfer window in line with the rest of Europe. Rather than close the day before the top-flight campaign begins, as has been the case for the past two seasons, the 2020 window will shut at 5pm on September 1.
SPAIN: For the first time since 2010 the Copa del Rey Final will feature neither Barcelona nor Real Madrid as they lost to Athletic Bilbao and Real Sociedad respectively in the quarter-finals.

Sunday February 9

ARGENTINA: A second division match between Independiente Rivadavia and Atlanta is abandoned when police say they are unable to guarantee spectators' safety as armed fans fight on the terraces. The game is halted for 20 minutes when fighting breaks out before the match is eventually called off with the score at 0-0.
ITALY: After Juventus' 2-1 loss at Verona the previous day, Inter ➤

➤ come from 2-0 down to beat Milan 4-2 and go top of Serie A.

Monday February 10

ITALY: Without any head coach experience at domestic level, former Italy under-21 boss Luigi Di Biagio becomes the first man to make the leap from working only with the national team set-up to leading a club in Serie A as he replaces Leonardo Semplici at SPAL until the end of the season. The club are bottom of the table, having won just four league games.

Tuesday February 11

CYPRUS: Defending champions APOEL fire coach Kare Ingebrigtsen after just 45 days in charge.
FRANCE: Ousmane Dembele is set to miss Euro 2020 after undergoing surgery on a hamstring tear.
GERMANY: Jurgen Klinsmann resigns as coach of Hertha Berlin after just 76 days in charge.
PARAGUAY: After being released by Turkish side Kayserispor for personal reasons in December, Togo striker Emmanuel Adebayor joins Olimpia, where he is reunited with former Manchester City team-mate Roque Santa Cruz.
SPAIN: Porto goalkeeper Iker Casillas is reported to be set to run against Luis Rubiales in the next elections for Spanish FA president.

Wednesday February 12

USA: MLS newcomers Inter Miami could be forced to change their name after losing the first part of a legal dispute with Internazionale. The Serie A side are suing for trademark infringement, and claim the term "Inter" is synonymous with them and no one else.

Thursday February 13

FRANCE: Fourth-tier Epinal's run in the Coupe de France is over as they lose 2-1 to Saint-Etienne in the quarter-finals. Fellow Championnat National 2 side Belfort also went out of the competition at the last-eight stage, losing 3-0 to Rennes on Tuesday. WS

Gone...Kane Ingebrigtsen

CAF Champions Lge

MARK GLEESON

Big guns clash again

Last-eight showdown

Last year's Champions League quarter-final clash between aristocrats Al Ahly and the "new money" of South Africa's Mamelodi Sundowns was one of few classics the competition can boast in its 23-year history.

Sundowns, owned by billionaire mining magnate Patrice Motsepe and boasting resources few other African sides have access to, put together a quality performance rarely seen before on the continent as they clinically dismantled African football's most successful club and won the first leg 5-0 in Pretoria.

Al Ahly, record eight-time competition winners, had never been treated as such before and it was their biggest defeat in 77 years. The Cairo giants were befuddled by the outcome, finding it hard to accept despite the obvious gulf in quality.

Usually such a reversal leads to the realisation that the tie is lost, leaving the vanquished side to seek some redemption in the second leg and then bow out with a little dignity restored. But it was an almost fever-pitched thirst for revenge that characterised the return game and it turned into a nasty affair with a rabid crowd baying for blood.

> "I believe Al Ahly did not know us and did not respect us last year"
> Mamelodi Sundowns coach Pitso Mosimane

Frenzied waves of attack ensued from kick-off, making for a bizarre spectacle at times, but in the end Al Ahly managed just one goal and went out with their tails between their legs.

Sundowns then lost in the semi-finals to Wydad, who in turn forfeited the Final to Esperance of Tunisia.

This year those four are all back for the last eight of the 24th edition of the competition, with Al Ahly and Sundowns drawn against each other again.

This time, the first leg is in Egypt with Sundowns' coach Pitso Mosimane quick to suggest the chances of another runaway win are highly unlikely.

"I believe Al Ahly did not know us and did not respect us last year," says Mosimane. "But after we knocked them out, the motivation will be different and they will be more prepared.

"They now know us, but they will also be under pressure because they are always favourites and there will be pressure to beat us."

He might be overstating the expectation on the latest generation at a club – now coached by ex-Anderlecht boss Rene Weiller – with a double-digital lead in the domestic championship but they also had a stuttering group campaign in the Champions League, where they finished second and were not sure of qualification until their last game.

The draw has seen the quest for an unprecedented third successive title for Esperance overshadowed, even if they proved efficient in advancing through the group phase.

They are drawn against Zamalek, which means they take on the Egyptians three weeks in a row: first in the African Super Cup (being played for a second successive year in Qatar) and then in the Champions League, with Zamalek at home in the first leg.

Esperance will be fancied to advance and meet either Raja or TP Mazembe Englebert of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Mazembe and Sundowns are the only two clubs from countries south of the Sahara in the last eight, emphasising the long-standing dominance of the competition by clubs from the Arabic speaking north. Mazembe and Sundowns, however, were the only

Dismantled... Al Ahly (in red) fell to Mamelodi Sundowns last year

Holders...history beckons for Esperance

unbeaten sides in the six-match group phase.

In the other half of the draw, the winner of the Al Ahly-Sundowns tie meets either Wydad or Etoile Sahel.

Wydad were the side who walked off in last year's Final and were initially given the right to replay before sanity prevailed. Yet they escaped a regulatory ban from the competition for a two-year period and have now made it to the last eight for a fifth successive year.

But this season has seen some turmoil at the club, with two coaching changes already and Frenchman Sebastien Desabre the latest incumbent. Etoile Sahel fired their coach, Juan Carlos Garrido, despite winning their group, thereby keeping up a long-standing habit of overheated reaction to negative results as they struggle in domestic competition.

There will be a new winner in the Confederation Cup as none of the quarter-finalists have ever taken the trophy before, although RS Berkane lost to Zamalek in the Final last year on penalties.

Pyramids FC, with the backing of Saudi money, are a new phenomenon in Egyptian football and favourites to replace compatriots Zamalek as title holders. WS

ESM XI

EUROPEAN SPORTS MEDIA

JANUARY 2020

HOW IT WORKS
Every month, journalists from each member of the European Sports Media group select their first XI based on the best individual performances from Europe's top competitions. For details of how each ESM member voted, visit worldsoccer.com/esm11

GOALKEEPERS

Marc-Andre TER STEGEN (Barcelona)	15
ALISSON (Liverpool)	9
Thibaut COURTOIS (Real Madrid)	8
Samir HANDANOVIC (Internazionale)	7
Jan OBLAK (Atletico Madrid)	6
Kasper SCHMEICHEL (Leicester City)	5
Manuel NEUER (Bayern Munich)	2
Andre ONANA (Ajax)	2
Wojciech SZCZESNY (Juventus)	2
ADRIAN (Liverpool)	1
David DE GEA (Manchester United)	1
EDERSON (Manchester City)	1
Dean HENDERSON (Sheffield United)	1
Lukas HRADECKY (Bayer Leverkusen)	1
Benjamin LECOMTE (Monaco)	1
Rui SILVA (Granada)	1
Tomas VACLIK (Sevilla)	1

DEFENDERS

Virgil VAN DIJK (Liverpool)	38
Trent ALEXANDER-ARNOLD (Liverpool)	29
Andrew ROBERTSON (Liverpool)	16
Sergio RAMOS (Real Madrid)	9
Raphael VARANE (Real Madrid)	8
Stefan DE VRIJ (Internazionale)	7
Ricardo PEREIRA (Leicester City)	7
Milan SKRINIAR (Internazionale)	7
Leonardo BONUCCI (Juventus)	6
Ben CHILWELL (Leicester City)	6
Alphonso DAVIES (Bayern Munich)	6
Mats HUMMELS (Borussia Dortmund)	6
Caglar SOYUNCU (Leicester City)	6
Ferland MENDY (Real Madrid)	5
Benjamin PAVARD (Bayern Munich)	5
Diego GODIN (Internazionale)	4
Achraf HAKIMI (Borussia Dortmund)	4
Gerard PIQUE (Barcelona)	4
Dayot UPAMECANO (RB Leipzig)	4
Serge AURIER (Tottenham Hotspur)	3
Theo HERNANDEZ (Milan)	3
Thiago SILVA (Paris Saint-Germain)	3
Nicolas TAGLIAFICO (Ajax)	3
David ALABA (Bayern Munich)	2
Cesar AZPILICUETA (Chelsea)	2
Matthijs DE LIGT (Juventus)	2
Robin GOSENS (Atalanta)	2
Marcel HALSTENBERG (RB Leipzig)	2
Joshua KIMMICH (Bayern Munich)	2
Lukas KLOSTERMANN (RB Leipzig)	2
Kalidou KOULIBALY (Napoli)	2
Clement LENGLET (Barcelona)	2
Renan LODI (Atletico Madrid)	2
MARCELO (Real Madrid)	2
Salif SANE (Schalke)	2
Stevan SAVIC (Atletico Madrid)	2
Chris SMALLING (Roma)	2
Kieran TRIPPIER (Atletico Madrid)	2
Yunis ABDELHAMID (Reims)	1
Jordi ALBA (Barcelona)	1
Marcos ALONSO (Chelsea)	1
Yeray ALVAREZ (Athletic Bilbao)	1
Cristian ANSALDI (Torino)	1
Youcef ATAL (Nice)	1
Sven BENDER (Bayer Leverkusen)	1
Juan BERNAT (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Antonio CANDREVA (Internazionale)	1
Daniel CARVAJAL (Real Madrid)	1
Aurelien CHEDJOU (Amiens)	1
Juan CUADRADO (Juventus)	1
DAVID LUIZ (Arsenal)	1
Simon DELI (Club Brugge)	1
Ruben DIAS (Benfica)	1
Victor DIAZ (Granada)	1
Nico ELVIDI (Borussia Monchengladbach)	1
Joe GOMEZ (Liverpool)	1
GRIMALDO (Benfica)	1
Presnel KIMPEMBE (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Robin KNOCHE (Wolfsburg)	1
Aleksandar KOLAROV (Roma)	1
Ibrahima KONATE (RB Leipzig)	1
Dejan LOVREN (Liverpool)	1
LUIZ FELIPE (Lazio)	1
Harry MAGUIRE (Manchester United)	1
Joel MATIP (Liverpool)	1
Willi ORBAN (RB Leipzig)	1
PEPE (Porto)	1
Antonio RUDIGER (Chelsea)	1
Nelson SEMEDO (Barcelona)	1
John STONES (Manchester City)	1
Alex TELLES Porto)	1
Kyle WALKER (Manchester City)	1

MIDFIELDERS

Kevin DE BRUYNE (Manchester City)	28
Angel DI MARIA (Paris Saint-Germain)	15
Federico VALVERDE (Real Madrid)	11
Jordan HENDERSON (Liverpool)	9
CASEMIRO (Real Madrid)	7
Toni KROOS (Real Madrid)	7
James MADDISON (Leicester City)	6
Stefano SENSI (Internazionale)	6
Hakim ZIYECH (Ajax)	6
Miralem PJANIC (Juventus)	5
Youri TIELEMANS (Leicester City)	5
Georginio WIJNALDUM (Liverpool)	5
Wilfred NDIDI (Leicester City)	4
Marcelo BROZOVIC (Internazionale)	3
Bruno FERNANDES (Sporting/Manchester United)	3
Papu GOMEZ (Atalanta)	3
Ilkay GUNDOGAN (Manchester City)	3
LUIS ALBERTO (Lazio)	3
THIAGO Alcantara (Bayern Munich)	3
Dele ALLI (Tottenham Hotspur)	2
Philippe COUTINHO (Bayern Munich)	2
Frenkie DE JONG (Barcelona)	2
Emil FORSBERG (RB Leipzig)	2
Amine HARIT (Schalke)	2
Josip ILICIC (Atalanta)	2
Mason MOUNT (Chelsea)	2
Martin ODEGAARD (Real Sociedad)	2
Marco VERRATTI (Paris Saint-Germain)	2
ARTHUR (Barcelona)	1
Laszlo BENES (Borussia Monchengladbach)	1
Sergio BUSQUETS (Barcelona)	1
Santi CAZORLA (Villarreal)	1
FABINHO (Liverpool)	1
FELIPE ANDERSON (West Ham United)	1
FERNANDINHO (Manchester City)	1
Alexander GOLOVIN (Monaco)	1
Idrissa GUEYE (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Eden HAZARD (Real Madrid)	1
Jonas HOFMANN (Borussia M'gladbach)	1
N'Golo KANTE (Chelsea)	1
Naby KEITA (Liverpool)	1
Sergej MILINKOVIC-SAVIC (Lazio)	1
James MILNER (Liverpool)	1
Radja NAINGGOLAN (Cagliari)	1
Christopher NKUNKU (RB Leipzig)	1
Lucas OCAMPOS (Sevilla)	1
Franck RIBERY (Fiorentina)	1
Marcel SABITZER (RB Leipzig)	1
Bernardo SILVA (Manchester City)	1
David SILVA (Manchester City)	1
Calvin STENGS (AZ)	1
Dusan TADIC (Ajax)	1
Hans VANAKEN (Club Brugge)	1
Donny VAN DE BEEK (Ajax)	1
Axel WITSEL (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Denis ZAKARIA (Borussia M'gladbach)	1

FORWARDS

Robert LEWANDOWSKI (Bayern Munich)	37
Lionel MESSI (Barcelona)	32
Cristiano RONALDO (Juventus)	20
Erling HAALAND (Red Bull Salzburg/Borussia Dortmund)	13
ROBERTO FIRMINO (Liverpool)	10
Ciro IMMOBILE (Lazio)	9
Sadio MANE (Liverpool)	9
Timo WERNER (RB Leipzig)	9
NEYMAR (Paris Saint-Germain)	8
Jadon SANCHO (Borussia Dortmund)	8
Kylian MBAPPE (Paris Saint-Germain)	5
Sergio AGUERO (Manchester City)	4
Karim BENZEMA (Real Madrid)	4
Paulo DYBALA (Juventus)	4
Mauro ICARDI (Paris Saint-Germain)	4
Lautaro MARTINEZ (Internazionale)	4
Donyell MALEN (PSV)	4
Jamie VARDY (Leicester City)	4
Islam SLIMANI (Monaco)	3
Adama TRAORE (Wolverhampton Wanderers)	3
Dries MERTENS (Napoli)	2
Marcus RASHFORD (Manchester United)	2
Dominic CALVERT-LEWIN (Everton)	1
Ansu FATI (Barcelona)	1
Alireza JAHANBAKHSH (Brighton & HA)	1
Romelu LUKAKU (Internazionale)	1
Quincy PROMES (Ajax)	1
Teemu PUKKI (Norwich City)	1
Raheem STERLING (Manchester City)	1
Luis SUAREZ (Barcelona)	1

ESM – EUROPEAN SPORTS MEDIA
The members of ESM are: *A Bola* (Portugal), *Elf* (Holland), *Fanatik* (Turkey), *Frankfurter Allegmeine Zeitung* (Germany), *Goal News* (Greece), *Kicker* (Germany), *Marca* (Spain), *Nemzeti Sport* (Hungary), *So Foot* (France), *Sport* (Belgium), *Sport Express* (Russia), *De Telegraaf* (Holland), *TIPSbladet* (Denmark), *World Soccer* (England). More details of votes at **worldsoccer.com/votes**

Club football

AFRICA

CAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group A

Nov 30: Primeiro Agosto (Ang) 1 Zesco United (Zam) 1; TP Mazembe (DRC) 3 Zamalek (Egy) 0.
Dec 7: Zamalek 2 Primeiro Agosto 0; Zesco United 1 TP Mazembe 2.
Dec 27: Primeiro Agosto 1 TP Mazembe 1.
Dec 28: Zesco United 1 Zamalek 1.
Jan 10: Zamalek 2 Zesco United 0.
Jan 11: TP Mazembe 2 Primeiro Agosto 1.
Jan 24: Zamalek 0 TP Mazembe 0.
Jan 25: Zesco United 1 Primeiro Agosto 1.
Feb 1: Primeiro Agosto 0 Zamalek 0; TP Mazembe 3 Zesco United 1.

CAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP A – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
TP Mazembe (Q)	6	4	2	0	11	4	14
Zamalek (Q)	6	2	3	1	5	4	9
Prim'o Agosto	6	0	4	2	4	7	4
Zesco Utd	6	0	3	3	5	10	3

Group B

Nov 29: Al Hilal Omdurman (Sud) 2 FC Platinum (Zim) 1; Etoile Sahel (Tun) 1 Al Ahly (Egy) 0.
Dec 6: Al Ahly 2 Al Hilal Omdurman 1.
Dec 7: FC Platinum 0 Etoile Sahel 3.
Dec 28: Al Ahly 2 FC Platinum 0; Etoile Sahel 0 Al Hilal Omdurman 1.
Jan 11: Al Hilal Omdurman 1 Etoile Sahel 2; FC Platinum 1 Al Ahly 1.
Jan 25: FC Platinum 0 Al Hilal Omdurman 1.
Jan 26: Al Ahly 1 Etoile Sahel 0.
Feb 1: Al Hilal Omdurman 1 Al Ahly 1; Etoile Sahel 2 FC Platinum 0.

CAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP B – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Etoile Sahel (Q)	6	4	0	2	8	3	12
Al Ahly (Q)	6	3	2	1	7	4	11
Al Hilal O	6	3	1	2	7	6	10
FC Platinum	6	0	1	5	2	11	1

Group C

Nov 30: Mamelodi Sundowns (SAf) 3 Petro Atletico (Ang) 0; USM Alger (Alg) 1 Wydad Casablanca (Mor) 1.
Dec 7: Petro Atletico 1 USM Alger 1; Wydad Casablanca 0 Mamelodi Sundowns 0.
Dec 28: USM Alger 0 Mamelodi Sundowns 1; Wydad Casablanca 4 Petro Atletico 1.
Jan 11: Mamelodi Sundowns 2 USM Alger 1; Petro Atletico 2 Wydad Casablanca 2.
Jan 24: Wydad Casablanca 3 USM Alger 1.
Jan 25: Petro Atletico 2 Mamelodi Sundowns 2.
Feb 1: Mamelodi Sundowns 1 Wydad Casablanca 0; USM Alger 2 Petro Atletico 2.

CAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP C – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mamelodi S (Q)	6	4	2	0	9	3	14
Wydad C (Q)	6	2	3	1	10	6	9
Petro Atletico	6	0	4	2	8	14	4
USM Alger	6	0	3	3	6	10	3

Group D

Nov 29: JS Kabylie (Alg) 1 AS Vita (DRC) 0.
Nov 30: Raja Casablanca (Mor) 0 Esperance Tunis (Tun) 2.
Dec 6: AS Vita 0 Raja Casablanca 1; Esperance Tunis 1 JS Kabylie 0.
Dec 27: Esperance Tunis 0 AS Vita 0; Raja Casablanca 2 JS Kabylie 0.
Jan 10: JS Kabylie 0 Raja Casablanca 0.
Jan 11: AS Vita 0 Esperance Tunis 2.
Jan 25: AS Vita 4 JS Kabylie 1; Esperance Tunis 2 Raja Casablanca 2.
Feb 1: JS Kabylie 1 Esperance Tunis 0; Raja Casablanca 1 AS Vita 0.

CAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP D – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Esperance T (Q)	6	3	2	1	7	3	11
Raja C (Q)	6	3	2	1	6	4	11
JS Kabylie	6	2	1	3	3	7	7
AS Vita	6	1	1	4	4	6	4

● *Top 2 in each group qualified for quarter-finals*

Quarter-finals draw

Al Ahly v Mamelodi Sundowns
Raja Casablanca v TP Mazembe
Wydad Casablanca v Etoile Sahel
Zamalek v Esperance Tunis
1st legs - Feb 28/29; 2nd legs - Mar 6/7

CONFEDERATION CUP

Group A

Dec 1: Enugu Rangers (Nga) 1 Pyramids (Egy) 3; Nouadhibou (Mra) 2 Al Masry (Egy) 3.
Dec 8: Al Masry 4 Enugu Rangers 2; Pyramids 6 Nouadhibou 0.
Dec 29: Al Masry 1 Pyramids 2; Nouadhibou 0 Enugu Rangers 0.
Jan 12: Enugu Rangers 1 Nouadhibou 1; Pyramids 2 Al Masry 0.
Jan 26: Al Masry 1 Nouadhibou 0; Pyramids 0 Enugu Rangers 1.
Feb 2: Enugu Rangers 1 Al Masry 1; Nouadhibou 0 Pyramids 1.

CONFEDERATION CUP – GROUP A – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Pyramids (Q)	6	5	0	1	14	3	15
Al Masry (Q)	6	3	1	2	10	9	10
Enugu Rangers	6	1	3	2	6	9	6
Nouadhibou	6	0	2	4	3	12	2

Group B

Dec 1: Al Nasr (Lby) 1 Djoliba (Mli) 1; Bidvest Wits (SAf) 0 Horoya (Gui) 0.
Dec 8: Djoliba 1 B Wits 0; Horoya 3 Al Nasr 0.
Dec 29: B Wits 0 Al Nasr 0; Horoya 1 Djoliba 0.
Jan 12: Al Nasr 2 B Wits 1; Djoliba 0 Horoya 0.
Jan 26: Djoliba 0 Al Nasr 1; Horoya 2 B Wits 1.
Feb 2: Al Nasr 0 Horoya 2; B Wits 0 Djoliba 2.

CONFEDERATION CUP – GROUP B – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Horoya (Q)	6	4	2	0	8	1	14
Al Nasr (Q)	6	2	2	2	4	7	8
Djoliba	6	2	2	2	4	3	8
Bidvest Wits	6	0	2	4	2	7	2

Group C

Dec 1: DC Motema Pembe (DRC) 1 Zanaco (Zam) 1; RS Berkane (Mor) 3 ESAE (Ben) 0.
Dec 8: ESAE 0 DC Motema Pembe 2; Zanaco 1 RS Berkane 1.
Dec 29: ESAE 0 Zanaco 0; RS Berkane 3 DC Motema Pembe 0.
Jan 12: DC Motema Pembe 1 RS Berkane 0; Zanaco 3 ESAE 0.
Jan 26: ESAE 1 RS Berkane 5; Zanaco 2 DC Motema Pembe 1.
Feb 2: DC Motema Pembe 1 ESAE 0; RS Berkane 1 Zanaco 1.

CONFEDERATION CUP – GROUP C – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
RS Berkane (Q)	6	3	2	1	13	4	11
Zanaco (Q)	6	2	4	0	8	4	10
Motema Pembe	6	3	1	2	6	6	10
ESAE	6	0	1	5	1	14	1

Group D

Dec 1: Hassania Agadir (Mor) 2 Enyimba (Nga) 0; San Pedro (IvC) 0 Paradou AC (Alg) 0.
Dec 8: Enyimba 1 San Pedro 0; Paradou AC 0 Hassania Agadir 2.
Dec 29: Paradou AC 1 Enyimba 0; San Pedro 1 Hassania Agadir 1.
Jan 12: Enyimba 4 Paradou AC 1; Hassania Agadir 3 San Pedro 0.
Jan 26: Enyimba 1 Hassania Agadir 1; Paradou AC 0 San Pedro 0.
Feb 2: Hassania Agadir 0 Paradou AC 3; San Pedro 2 Enyimba 5.

CONFEDERATION CUP – GROUP D – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Hassania A (Q)	6	3	2	1	9	5	11
Enyimba (Q)	6	3	1	2	11	7	10
Paradou AC	6	2	2	2	5	6	8
San Pedro	6	0	3	3	3	10	3

● *Top 2 in each group qualified for quarter-finals*

Quarter-finals draw

Al Masry v RS Berkane; Al Nasr v Hassania Agadir; Enyimba v Horoya; Zanaco v Pyramids
1st legs - Mar1; 2nd legs - Mar 8

ASIA

AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

1st qualifying round

(single-leg ties)
Jan 14: Al Faisaly (Jor) 1 Kuwait SC (Kuw) 2 (aet); Ceres-Negros (Phi) 3 Shan United (Mym) 2; Chennai City (Ind) 0 Al Riffa (Bhn) 1; Tampines Rovers (Sin) 3 Bali United (Ins) 5 (aet).

2nd qualifying round

(single-leg ties)
Jan 21: Buriram United (Tha) 2 Ho Chi Minh City (Vie) 1; Kedah (Mly) 5 Tai Po (HK) 1; Lokomotiv Tashkent (Uzb) 0 Istiklol (Taj) 1; Melbourne Victory (Aus) 5 Bali United 0; Port (Tha) 0 Ceres-Negros 1.
Jan 22: Bunyodkor (Uzb) 4 Al Zawra'a (Irq) 1.
Jan 25: Esteghlal Tehran (Irn) 3 Kuwait SC 0; Shahr Khodro (Irn) 2 Al Riffa 1.

Final qualifying round

(single-leg ties)
Jan 28: Al Ahli (Sau) 1 Istiklol 0; Al Ain (UAE) 1 Bunyodkor 0; Al Rayyan (Qat) 0 Esteghlal Tehran 5; Al Sailiya (Qat) 0 Shahr Khodro 0 (aet, Shahr Khodro 5-4 on pens); FC Tokyo (Jap) 2 Ceres-Negros 0; Kashima Antlers (Jap) 0 Melbourne Victory 1; Seoul (SKo) 4 Kedah 1; Shanghai SIPG (Chn) 3 Buriram United 0.

● *Winning teams qualified for group stage*

NORTH KOREA

2018-19 – FINAL[1]	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
April 25 (C)	21	19	2	0	64	14	59
Ryomyong	22	14	4	4	55	22	46
Sobaeksu	24	13	6	5	34	20	45
Amnokgang	24	11	4	9	31	28	37
Kigwancha	23	10	6	7	36	31	36
Pyongyang SC	24	7	9	8	34	32	30
Hwaebul	24	7	9	8	25	31	30
Rimyongsu	23	7	8	8	20	24	29
Sonbong	23	6	8	9	25	34	26
Jebi	24	5	7	12	20	40	22
Wolmido	24	6	4	14	22	45	22
Kalmaegi	24	4	6	14	22	40	18
Kyong'pson	24	3	7	14	22	49	16

[1]*Remaining games of the 24-round programme were cancelled*

OCEANIA

OFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Qualifying stage

Jan 25: Lupe Ole Soaga (Sam) 2 Veitongo (Ton) 0.
Jan 28: Tupapa Maraerenga (Coo) 0 Lupe Ole Soaga 0.
Jan 31: Veitongo 2 Tupapa Maraerenga 2.

OFC CHAMPS LEAGUE – QUAL STAGE – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lupe O S'ga (Q)	2	1	1	0	2	0	4
Tupapa M'ga (Q)	2	0	2	0	2	2	2
Veitongo	2	0	1	1	2	4	1

● *Top 2 have qualified for group stage*

Group stage draw

Group A
Eastern Suburbs (NZ), Galaxy (Van), Hekari United (PNG), Hienghene Sport (NwC).
To be played Feb16-22 in Papua New Guinea

Group B
Henderson Eels (Sol), Lae City (PNG), Lautoka (Fij), Malampa Revivors (Van).
To be played Feb15-21 in Vanuatu

Group C
Magenta (NwC), Solomon Warriors (Sol), Tiare Tahiti (Tah), Tupapa Maraerenga.
To be played Mar1-7 in New Caledonia

Group D
Auckland City (NZ), Ba (Fij), Lupe Ole Soaga, Venus (Tah).
To be played Mar1-7 in Tahiti

● *Top 2 in each group qualify for quarter-finals*

COOK ISLANDS

2019 – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tupapa M (C)	15	11	3	1	60	12	36
Nikao Sok'tak	15	10	2	3	59	23	32
Puaikura	15	6	4	5	35	22	22
Titikaveka	15	5	3	7	23	52	18
Matavera-Ng'a	15	2	3	10	15	44	9
Avatiu	15	2	3	10	19	58	9

SOLOMON ISLANDS

2019-20 – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
S Warriors (C)	16	13	2	1	70	14	41
Henderson Eels	16	12	2	2	78	19	38
Kossa	16	10	2	4	53	25	32
Isabel United	16	10	1	5	48	28	31
Malaita Kingz	16	8	0	8	39	37	24
Laugu United	16	5	3	8	31	29	18
Marist	16	4	5	7	23	37	17
Guadalcanal	16	1	2	13	15	82	5
Kakamora	16	0	1	15	7	93	1

TONGA

2019 – FINAL	P	W	D	L	GD	Pts
Veitongo (C)	21	21	0	0	+83	63
Lotoha'apai U	21	16	0	5	+27	48
Longoteme	21	12	2	7	+28	38
Lavengatonga	21	10	2	9	+23	32
Navutoka	21	8	2	11	-3	26
Marist	21	8	2	11	-22	26
Fahefa	21	2	3	16	-78	9
Ha'amoko Utd	21	1	1	19	-57	4

SOUTH AMERICA

LIBERTADORES CUP

Group stage draw

Group A
Flamengo (Bra), Independiente del Valle (Ecu), Junior (Col), *3rd qualifying round winner.*

Group B
Bolivar (Bol), Palmeiras (Bra), Tigre (Arg), *3rd qualifying round winner.*

Group C
Athletico Paranaense (Bra), Colo Colo (Chl), Jorge Wilstermann (Bol), Penarol (Uru).

Group D
Binacional (Per), LDU Quito (Ecu), River Plate (Arg), Sao Paulo (Bra).

Group E
America (Col), Gremio (Bra), Universidad Catolica (Chl), *3rd qualifying round winner.*

Group F
Alianza Lima (Per), Estudiantes de Merida (Ven), Nacional (Uru), Racing (Arg).

Group G
Defensa y Justicia (Arg), Delfin (Ecu), Olimpia (Par), Santos (Bra).

Group H
Boca Juniors (Arg), Caracas (Ven), Libertad (Par), *3rd qualifying round winner.*

Matchdays: *Mar 3-5, Mar10-12, Mar17-19, Apr 7-9, Apr 21-23, May 5-7.*

● *Top 2 in each group qualify for round of16; the 8 3rd-placed teams enter Sudamericana Cup*

CONCACAF

CONCACAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

1st round draw

Alianza (ESv) v Tigres UANL (Mex)
Comunicaciones (Gtm) v America (Mex)
Leon (Mex) v Los Angeles FC (USA)
Motagua (Hnd) v Atlanta United (USA)
Olimpia (Hnd) v Seattle Sounders (USA)
Portmore United (Jam) v Cruz Azul (Mex)
San Carlos (CR) v New York City (USA)
Saprissa (CR) v Montreal Impact (Can)
1st legs - Feb18-20; 2nd legs - Feb 25-27

Internationals

BANGABANDHU GOLD CUP

Played in Dhaka, Bangladesh

Group A

Jan15
Bangladesh 0
Palestine 2 (Salem 29, L Kharoub 58)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Pandy (Nep)

Jan17
Palestine 2 (Abu Warda 90+3, Salem 90+6)
Sri Lanka 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Hanafiah (Mly)

Jan19
Sri Lanka 0
Bangladesh 3 (M Mia 17, 64, Ibrahim 83)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Rai (Bhu)

BANGABANDHU GOLD CUP – GROUP A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Palestine (Q)	2	2	0	0	4	0	6
Bangladesh (Q)	2	1	0	1	3	2	3
Sri Lanka	2	0	0	2	0	5	0

Group B

Jan16
Mauritius 1 (A Francois 3)
Burundi 4 (J Nshimirimana 28, 47, 85, Asman Ndikumana 41)
HT: 1-2. **Ref:** M Rahman (Ban)

Jan18
Burundi 3 (J Nshimirimana 54, Tambwe 60, 61)
Seychelles 1 (Monnaie 26)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Uddin (Ban)

Jan 20
Seychelles 2 (Waye-Hive 19, Monnaie 28)
Mauritius 2 (Ferre 67, A Francois 90+1)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Pandey (Nep)
Sent off: Mathiot (Seychelles) 83

BANGABANDHU GOLD CUP – GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Burundi (Q)	2	2	0	0	7	2	6
Seychelles (Q)	2	0	1	1	3	5	1
Mauritius	2	0	1	1	3	6	1

● *The top 2 in both groups qualified for the semi-finals*

Semi-finals

Jan 22
Palestine 1 (L Kharoub 79)
Seychelles 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** M Rahman (Ban)

Jan 23
Burundi 3 (J Nshimirimana 43, 45+2, 79)
Bangladesh 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Pandey (Nep)

Final

Jan 25
Palestine 3 (Salem 3, Maraaba 10, L Kharoub 26)
Burundi 1 (Asman Ndikumana 60)
HT: 3-0. **Ref:** M Rahman (Ban)

FRIENDLIES

Wednesday, January 15

Jan15 - Irvine, USA
Canada 0
Iceland 1 (Eyjolfsson 21)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Vazquez (USA)
Canada: Crepeau - Laryea (Bassong 46), Didic, Miller, Adekugbe (Morgan 79), Brym, Fraser, Piette, Osorio, Ricketts (Bair 90), Akindele (Nelson 75).
Iceland: Halldorsson - Eyjolfsson, Arnason (Saevarsson 46), Gretarsson, D Olafsson, Anderson (Sampsted 89), Hauksson, Thrandarson (Thordarson 73), Gunnlaugsson (Antonsson 81), Kjartan Finnbogason (Karlsson 60), Kjartansson (Kristjan Finnbogason 60).

Sunday, January 19

Jan19 - Carson, USA
El Salvador 0
Iceland 1 (Kjartan Finnbogason 63)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Vazquez (USA)
El Salvador: Carabantes (Villalobos 46) - Castro, Renderos (Mendoza 58), Mancia, Flores Jaco, D Ceren, Granitto (Burgos 65), Punyed, Ortiz, Portillo (Cerritos 83), Diaz (Corea 73).
Iceland: Halldorsson - Saevarsson (Sampsted 46), Arnason (Eyjolfsson 61), Sverrisson, Antonsson, Haraldsson (Andersson 61), Kjartan Finnbogason (Sigthorsson 74), Thordarson (Hauksson 77), Leifsson, Karlsson, Kristjan Finnbogason (Kjartansson 46).

Saturday, February 1

Feb1 - Carson
United States 1 (Llanez pen 50)
Costa Rica 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 9,172. **Ref:** Nation (Jam)
United States: Johnson (Hamid 76) - Cannon, Zimmerman, Long (McKenzie 63), Vines (Gasper 77), Aaronson (Servania 66), Yueill, Lletget, Arriola, Ferreira (Zardes 63), Llanez (Lewis 73).
Costa Rica: Alvarado - Fuller, Brown, Gonzalez, Matarrita (Mora 63), Segura (Diaz 46), Tejeda (Alfaro 70), Guzman, Lassiter (Leal 46), Urena (Ugalde 78), Johan Venegas (Nunez 78).

EURO 2020

Qualifying play-offs

Path A
Semi-finals:
Bulgaria v Hungary
Iceland v Romania

Path B
Semi-finals:
Bosnia-Herzegovina v Northern Ireland
Slovakia v Republic of Ireland

Path C
Semi-finals:
Norway v Serbia
Scotland v Israel

Path D
Semi-finals:
Georgia v Belarus
North Macedonia v Kosovo

● *The winners of each path's semi-finals (single-leg, Mar 26) will meet in a Final (single-leg, Mar 31). The 4 Final winners will qualify for the Euro 2020 finals*

Finals draw & match schedule

Group A
Italy
Switzerland
Turkey
Wales

Games to be played in Italy & Azerbaijan
Jun 12 Turkey v Italy (Rome)
Jun 13 Wales v Switzerland (Baku)
Jun 17 Turkey v Wales (Baku)
Jun 17 Italy v Switzerland (Rome)
Jun 21 Switzerland v Turkey (Baku)
Jun 21 Italy v Wales (Rome)

Group B
Belgium
Denmark
Finland
Russia

Games to be played in Denmark & Russia
Jun 13 Denmark v Finland (Copenhagen)
Jun 13 Belgium v Russia (St Petersburg)
Jun 17 Finland v Russia (St Petersburg)
Jun 18 Denmark v Belgium (Copenhagen)
Jun 22 Russia v Denmark (Copenhagen)
Jun 22 Finland v Belgium (St Petersburg)

Group C
Austria
Holland
Ukraine
Path A or D winner

Games to be played in Romania & Holland
Jun 14 Austria v Path A or D (Bucharest)
Jun 14 Holland v Ukraine (Amsterdam)
Jun 18 Ukraine v Path A or D (Bucharest)
Jun 18 Holland v Austria (Amsterdam)
Jun 22 Path A or D v Holland (Amsterdam)
Jun 22 Ukraine v Austria (Bucharest)

Group D
Croatia
Czech Republic
England
Path C winner

Games to be played in England & Scotland
Jun 14 England v Croatia (London)
Jun 15 Path C v Czech Republic (Glasgow)
Jun 19 Croatia v Czech Republic (Glasgow)
Jun 19 England v Path C (London)
Jun 23 Croatia v Path C (Glasgow)
Jun 23 Czech Republic v England (London)

Group E
Poland
Spain
Sweden
Path B winner

Games to be played in Rep of Ireland & Spain
Jun 15 Poland v Path B (Dublin)
Jun 15 Spain v Sweden (Bilbao)
Jun 19 Sweden v Path B (Dublin)
Jun 20 Spain v Poland (Bilbao)
Jun 24 Path B v Spain (Bilbao)
Jun 24 Sweden v Poland (Dublin)

Group F
France
Germany
Portugal
Path A or D winner

Games to be played in Hungary & Germany
Jun 16 Path A or D v Portugal (Budapest)
Jun 16 France v Germany (Munich)
Jun 20 Path A or D v France (Budapest)
Jun 20 Portugal v Germany (Munich)
Jun 24 Portugal v France (Budapest)
Jun 24 Germany v Path A or D (Munich)

(if Romania win the Path A Final, they will play in Group C, and the Path D winner will play in Group F; if Romania do not win the Path A Final, the team that does win it will play in Group F, and the winner of the Path D Final will play in Group C)

● *The top 2 in each group and the 4 3rd-placed teams with the best record will qualify for the round of16*

Round of 16
Jun 27 Gp A 2nd v Gp B 2nd (Amsterdam) (RS1)
Jun 27 Gp A 1st v Gp C 2nd (London) (RS2)
Jun 28 Gp C 1st v Gp D, E or F 3rd (Budapest) (RS3)
Jun 28 Gp B 1st v Gp A, D, E or F 3rd (Bilbao) (RS4)
Jun 29 Gp D 2nd v Gp E 2nd (Copenhagen) (RS5)
Jun 29 Gp F 1st v Gp A, B or C 3rd (Bucharest) (RS6)
Jun 30 Gp D 1st v Gp F 2nd (Dublin) (RS7)
Jun 30 Gp E 1st v Gp A, B, C or D 3rd (Glasgow) (RS8)

Quarter-finals
Jul 3 RS6 winner v RS5 winner (St Petersburg) (QF1)
Jul 3 RS4 winner v RS2 winner (Munich) (QF2)
Jul 4 RS3 winner v RS1 winner (Baku) (QF3)
Jul 4 RS8 winner v RS7 winner (Rome) (QF4)

Semi-finals
Jul 7 QF2 winner v QF1 winner (London)
Jul 8 QF4 winner v QF3 winner (London)

Final
Jul 12 (London)

2020 COPA AMERICA

Draw & match schedule

● *Australia & Qatar are invited teams*

Group A
Argentina
Australia
Bolivia
Chile
Paraguay
Uruguay

Games to be played in Argentina
Jun 12 Argentina v Chile (Buenos Aires)
Jun 13 Australia v Uruguay (Cordoba)
Jun 13 Paraguay v Bolivia (Mendoza)
Jun 16 Argentina v Uruguay (Cordoba)
Jun 16 Chile v Bolivia (Mendoza)
Jun 17 Paraguay v Australia (La Plata)
Jun 20 Argentina v Paraguay (Buenos Aires)
Jun 21 Uruguay v Chile (Mendoza)
Jun 22 Australia v Bolivia (La Plata)
Jun 25 Chile v Paraguay (Cordoba)
Jun 26 Australia v Argentina (Buenos Aires)
Jun 26 Bolivia v Uruguay (La Plata)
Jun 30 Bolivia v Argentina (La Plata)
Jun 30 Chile v Australia (Cordoba)
Jun 30 Uruguay v Paraguay (Santiago del Estero)

Group B
Brazil
Colombia
Ecuador
Peru
Qatar
Venezuela

Games to be played in Colombia
Jun 13 Colombia v Ecuador (Bogota)
Jun 14 Brazil v Venezuela (Cali)
Jun 14 Peru v Qatar (Medellin)
Jun 17 Colombia v Venezuela (Cali)
Jun 18 Peru v Brazil (Medellin)
Jun 18 Ecuador v Qatar (Bogota)
Jun 21 Colombia v Peru (Medellin)
Jun 22 Venezuela v Ecuador (Bogota)
Jun 23 Brazil v Qatar (Barranquilla)
Jun 27 Brazil v Colombia (Barranquilla)
Jun 27 Ecuador v Peru (Medellin)
Jun 28 Qatar v Venezuela (Cali)
Jul 1 Qatar v Colombia (Barranquilla)
Jul 1 Ecuador v Brazil (Bogota)
Jul 1 Venezuela v Peru (Cali)

● *The top 4 in both groups will qualify for the quarter-finals*

Quarter-finals
Jul 4 Gp B 1st v Gp A 4th (Barranquilla) (QF1)
Jul 4 Gp B 2nd v Gp A 3rd (Cali) (QF2)
Jul 5 Gp A 2nd v Gp B 3rd (La Plata) (QF3)
Jul 5 Gp A 1st v Gp B 4th (Buenos Aires) (QF4)

Semi-finals
Jul 8 QF3 winner v QF4 winner (Cordoba)
Jul 8 QF2 winner v QF1 winner (Medellin)

3rd-place match
Jul 11 (Bogota)

Final
Jul 12 (Barranquilla)

2021 CONCACAF GOLD CUP QUALS

1st round draw
Guadeloupe v St Vincent & The Grenadines (FR1)
Barbados v Guyana (FR2)
Bahamas v French Guiana (FR3)
Guatemala v Montserrat (FR4)
1st legs - Mar 26; 2nd legs - Mar 31, 2020

2nd round draw
FR1 winner v Haiti
FR2 winner v Trinidad & Tobago
FR3 winner v Bermuda
FR4 winner v Cuba
1st & 2nd legs in June 2020

● *The 4 winning teams will take the last 4 places available at the16-team 2021 CONCACAF Gold Cup finals*

Already qualified for finals:
Canada, Costa Rica, Curacao, El Salvador, Grenada, Honduras, Jamaica, Martinique, Mexico, Panama, Surinam, United States

2022 WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

AFRICA section
(5 finals places available)

2nd round draw

Group A
Algeria, Burkina Faso, Djibouti, Niger

Group B
Equatorial Guinea, Mauritania, Tunisia, Zambia

Group C
Cape Verde Islands, Central African Republic, Liberia, Nigeria

Group D
Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Malawi, Mozambique

Group E
Kenya, Mali, Rwanda, Uganda

Group F
Angola, Egypt, Gabon, Libya

Group G
Ethiopia, Ghana, South Africa, Zimbabwe

Group H
Congo, Namibia, Senegal, Togo

Group I
Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Morocco, Sudan

Group J
Benin, DR Congo, Madagascar, Tanzania

Matchdays: Oct 5-13, Nov 9-17 (2020); Mar 22-30 (x2), Aug 30-Sep 7, Oct 4-12 (2021)

● *The10 group winners will qualify for 3rd round*

3rd round

● *The10 teams will be drawn in 5 home-and-away ties, the winners of which will qualify for the World Cup finals*

ASIA section
(4 or 5 finals places available, not including the automatic berth for hosts Qatar)

2nd round
Current standings & remaining fixtures (all 2020)

Group A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Syria	5	5	0	0	14	4	15
China	4	2	1	1	13	2	7
Philippines	5	2	1	2	8	8	7
Maldives	5	2	0	3	6	10	6
Guam	5	0	0	5	2	19	0

Mar 26: China v Maldives; Philippines v Guam.
Mar 31: Guam v China; Maldives v Syria.
Jun 4: China v Philippines; Guam v Syria.
Jun 9: China v Syria; Philippines v Maldives.

Group B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Australia	4	4	0	0	16	1	12
Kuwait	5	3	1	1	17	3	10
Jordan	5	3	1	1	10	2	10
Nepal	5	1	0	4	2	16	3
Taiwan	5	0	0	5	2	25	0

Mar 26: Australia v Kuwait; Nepal v Taiwan.
Mar 31: Kuwait v Jordan; Nepal v Australia.
Jun 4: Australia v Taiwan; Nepal v Jordan.
Jun 9: Australia v Jordan; Taiwan v Kuwait.

Group C

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Iraq	5	3	2	0	9	2	11
Bahrain	5	2	3	0	3	1	9
Iran	4	2	0	2	17	3	6
Hong Kong	5	1	2	2	3	5	5
Cambodia	5	0	1	4	1	22	1

Mar 26: Bahrain v Cambodia; Iran v Hong Kong.
Mar 31: Cambodia v Iran; Hong Kong v Iraq.
Jun 4: Iran v Bahrain; Iraq v Cambodia.
Jun 9: Bahrain v Hong Kong; Iran v Iraq.

Group D

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Uzbekistan	5	3	0	2	12	6	9
Saudi Arabia	4	2	2	0	8	4	8
Singapore	5	2	1	2	7	10	7
Yemen	5	1	2	2	6	11	5
Palestine	5	1	1	3	3	5	4

Mar 26: Palestine v Singapore; Saudi Arabia v Yemen.
Mar 31: Singapore v Saudi Arabia; Yemen v Uzbekistan.
Jun 4: Saudi Arabia v Palestine; Uzbekistan v Singapore.
Jun 9: Palestine v Yemen; Saudi Arabia v Uzbekistan.

Group E

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Qatar	5	4	1	0	11	1	13
Oman	5	4	0	1	11	4	12
Afghanistan	5	1	1	3	2	11	4
India	5	0	3	2	3	5	3
Bangladesh	4	0	1	3	2	8	1

Mar 26: Bangladesh v Afghanistan; India v Qatar.
Mar 31: Afghanistan v Oman; Qatar v Bangladesh.
Jun 4: Bangladesh v India; Oman v Qatar.
Jun 9: Bangladesh v Oman; India v Afghanistan.

Group F

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Japan	4	4	0	0	13	0	12
Kyrgyzstan	5	2	1	2	10	5	7
Tajikistan	5	2	1	2	6	8	7
Myanmar	5	2	0	3	5	13	6
Mongolia	5	1	0	4	2	10	3

Mar 26: Japan v Myanmar; Tajikistan v Mongolia.
Mar 31: Mongolia v Japan; Myanmar v Kyrgyzstan.
Jun 4: Japan v Tajikistan; Kyrgyzstan v Mongolia.
Jun 9: Japan v Kyrgyzstan; Tajikistan v Myanmar.

Group G

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Vietnam	5	3	2	0	5	1	11
Malaysia	5	3	0	2	8	6	9
Thailand	5	2	2	1	6	3	8
UAE	4	2	0	2	8	4	6
Indonesia	5	0	0	5	3	16	0

Mar 26: Thailand v Indonesia; UAE v Malaysia.
Mar 31: Indonesia v UAE; Malaysia v Vietnam.
Jun 4: UAE v Thailand; Vietnam v Indonesia.
Jun 9: Thailand v Malaysia; UAE v Vietnam.

Group H

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Turkmenistan	5	3	0	2	8	5	9
South Korea	4	2	2	0	10	0	8
Lebanon	5	2	2	1	5	3	8
North Korea	5	2	2	1	4	3	8
Sri Lanka	5	0	0	5	0	16	0

Mar 26: North Korea v Sri Lanka: South Korea v Turkmenistan.
Mar 31: Sri Lanka v South Korea; Turkmenistan v Lebanon.
Jun 4: Lebanon v Sri Lanka; South Korea v North Korea.
Jun 9: North Korea v Turkmenistan; South Korea v Lebanon.

● *The 8 group winners and the 4 runners-up with the best record will qualify for the 3rd round (Qatar are participating in this stage of the qualifiers even though, as 2022 World Cup hosts, they have an automatic place in the finals. If they win their group or finish as one of the 4 runners-up with the best record, the place they would have taken in the 3rd round will go to the runner-up with the 5th-best record)*

3rd round

● *The12 teams will be drawn into 2 home-and-away, round robin groups of 6 - the top 2 in both groups will qualify for the World Cup finals; the 3rd-placed teams will meet in a play-off, the winner of which will enter the inter-confederation play-offs to play for a place in the World Cup finals*

CONCACAF section
(3 or 4 finals places available)

● *The 6 highest-ranking teams in the FIFA rankings ofJuly 2020 will play in a single home-and-away, round-robin group - the top 3 will qualify for the World Cup finals; the 4th-placed team will meet the winner of the CONCACAF lower-ranking path Final in a play-off, the winner of which will enter the inter-confederation play-offs to play for a place in the World Cup finals*

● *The lower-ranking 29 teams in the FIFA rankings ofJuly 2020 will be drawn into 8 home-and-away, round-robin groups, the winners of which will enter a knockout phase of quarter-finals, semi-finals and Final. The Final winner will go into the play-off against the highest-ranking group's 4th-placed team*

EUROPE section
(13 finals places available)

● *All 55 teams will be drawn into10 home-and-away, round-robin groups (draw scheduled for Nov 29, 2020). The10 group winners will qualify for the World Cup finals; the 10 runners-up and the 2 best-ranked 2020-21 UEFA Nations League group winners which have not finished1st or 2nd in a World Cup qualifying group will be drawn into 3 sets of semi-finals. The winners of these semi-finals will meet in 3 Final matches, the winners of which will qualify for the World Cup finals*

OCEANIA section
(0 or 1 place available)

● *The winner of the section qualifiers (format yet to be determined) will enter the inter-confederation play-offs to play for a place in the World Cup finals*

SOUTH AMERICA section
(4 or 5 finals places available)

Fixtures
2020
Mar 26: Argentina v Ecuador; Brazil v Bolivia; Colombia v Venezuela; Paraguay v Peru; Uruguay v Chile.
Mar 31: Bolivia v Argentina; Chile v Colombia; Ecuador v Uruguay; Peru v Brazil; Venezuela v Paraguay.
Sep 3: Argentina v Paraguay; Bolivia v Ecuador; Brazil v Venezuela; Chile v Peru; Colombia v Uruguay.
Sep 8: Ecuador v Colombia; Paraguay v Bolivia; Peru v Argentina; Uruguay v Brazil; Venezuela v Chile.
Oct 8: Argentina v Uruguay; Bolivia v Peru; Chile v Paraguay; Colombia v Brazil; Venezuela v Ecuador.
Oct 13: Brazil v Argentina; Ecuador v Chile; Paraguay v Colombia; Peru v Venezuela; Uruguay v Bolivia.
Nov 12: Argentina v Chile; Bolivia v Venezuela; Brazil v Ecuador; Peru v Colombia; Uruguay v Paraguay.
Nov 17: Chile v Bolivia; Colombia v Argentina; Ecuador v Peru; Paraguay v Brazil; Venezuela v Uruguay.
2021
Mar 25: Bolivia v Colombia; Chile v Brazil; Ecuador v Paraguay; Peru v Uruguay; Venezuela v Argentina.
Mar 30: Argentina v Bolivia; Brazil v Peru; Colombia v Chile; Paraguay v Venezuela; Uruguay v Ecuador.
Jun 3: Ecuador v Bolivia; Paraguay v Argentina; Peru v Chile; Uruguay v Colombia; Venezuela v Brazil.
Jun 8: Argentina v Peru; Bolivia v Paraguay; Brazil v Uruguay; Chile v Venezuela; Colombia v Ecuador.
Sep 2: Brazil v Colombia; Ecuador v Venezuela; Paraguay v Chile; Peru v Bolivia; Uruguay v Argentina.
Sep 7: Argentina v Brazil; Bolivia v Uruguay; Chile v Ecuador; Colombia v Paraguay; Venezuela v Peru.
Oct 7: Chile v Argentina; Colombia v Peru; Ecuador v Brazil; Paraguay v Uruguay; Venezuela v Bolivia.
Oct 12: Argentina v Colombia; Bolivia v Chile; Brazil v Paraguay; Peru v Ecuador; Uruguay v Venezuela.
Nov 11: Argentina v Venezuela; Brazil v Chile; Colombia v Bolivia; Paraguay v Ecuador; Uruguay v Peru.
Nov 16: Bolivia v Brazil; Chile v Uruguay; Ecuador v Argentina; Peru v Paraguay; Venezuela v Colombia.

● *The top 4 of this home-and-away, round robin single group will qualify for the World Cup finals; the 5th-placed team will enter the inter-confederation play-offs to play for a place in the World Cup finals*

KEY TO TABLES
(C) = champions
(Q) = qualified for next stage

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GOALKEEPERS

20	Paul **IZZO**	(25) 06.01.95
40	Dakota **OCHSENHAM**	(20) 28.09.99
30	Isaac **RICHARDS**	(20) 09.04.99

DEFENDERS

34	Yared **ABETEW**	(20) 15.06.99
23	Jordan **ELSEY**	(25) 02.03.94
22	Michael **JAKOBSEN** (Den)	(34) 02.01.86
7	Ryan **KITTO**	(25) 09.08.94
5	Michael **MARIA** (Cur)	(25) 03.01.95
2	Michael **MARRONE**	(33) 27.01.87
36	Noah **SMITH**	(19) 15.12.00

MIDFIELDERS

31	Mirko **BOLAND** (Ger)	(32) 23.04.87
18	Lachlan **BROOK**	(19) 08.02.01
28	Yongbin **CHEN** (Chn)	(21) 21.01.99
27	Louis **D'ARRIGO**	(18) 23.09.01
26	Ben **HALLORAN**	(27) 14.06.92
37	Jai **KING-BYRNE**	(18) 11.09.01
16	Nathan **KONSTANDOPOULOS**	(23) 26.06.96
6	Stefan **MAUK**	(24) 12.10.95
8	Riley **McGREE**	(21) 02.11.98
4	Ryan **STRAIN**	(22) 02.04.97

FORWARDS

14	George **BLACKWOOD**	(22) 04.06.97
17	Nikola **MILEUSNIC**	(26) 17.07.93
24	Pacifique **NIYONGABIRE**	(19) 15.03.00
11	Kristian **OPSETH** (Nor)	(20) 06.01.90
35	Al Hassan **TOURE**	(19) 30.05.00
49	Mohamed **TOURE**	(15) 26.03.04
10	James **TROISI**	(31) 03.07.88
29	Kusini **YENGI**	(21) 15.01.99

HEAD COACH

Gertjan **VERBEEK** (Hol)		(57) 01.08.62

Promising...Riley McGree returned to Adelaide last year after joining Club Brugge

BRISBANE ROAR

GOALKEEPERS

1	Max **CROCOMBE** (NZ)	(26) 12.08.93
31	Macklin **FREKE**	(21) 06.01.99
21	Jamie **YOUNG** (Eng)	(34) 25.05.85

DEFENDERS

5	Tom **ALDRED** (Sco)	(29) 11.09.90
4	Daniel **BOWLES**	(28) 19.10.91
3	Corey **BROWN**	(26) 07.01.94
29	Jordan **COURTNEY-PERKINS**	(17) 11.06.02
6	Macaulay **GILLESPHEY** (Eng)	(24) 24.11.95
19	Jack **HINGERT**	(29) 26.09.90
2	Scott **NEVILLE**	(31) 11.01.89
28	Izaack **POWELL**	(18) 12.02.02
15	Aaron **REARDON**	(20) 11.03.99
27	Kai **TREWIN**	(18) 18.05.01

MIDFIELDERS

25	Rahmat **AKBARI**	(19) 20.06.00
10	Brad **INMAN**	(28) 10.12.91
22	Jake **McGING**	(25) 22.05.94
14	George **MELLS**	(22) 23.05.97
12	Aiden **O'NEILL**	(21) 04.07.98
26	Jay **O'SHEA** (RoI)	(31) 10.08.88
8	Jacob **PEPPER**	(27) 08.05.92

FORWARDS

20	Aaron **AMADI-HOLLOWAY** (Wal)	(27) 22.01.93
77	Scott **McDONALD**	(36) 21.08.83
30	Mirza **MURATOVIC**	(20) 14.01.00
23	Dylan **WENZEL-HALLS**	(22) 15.12.97

HEAD COACH

Robbie **FOWLER** (Eng)		(44) 09.04.75

CENTRAL COAST MARINERS

GOALKEEPERS

1	Mark **BIRIGHITTI**	(28) 17.04.91
12	Adam **PEARCE**	(23) 08.01.97

DEFENDERS

3	Jack **CLISBY**	(28) 16.02.92
16	Dylan **FOX**	(25) 15.04.94
2	Ziggy **GORDON** (Sco)	(26) 23.04.93
27	Lewis **MILLER**	(19) 24.08.00
15	Kye **ROWLES**	(21) 24.06.98
21	Ruon **TONGYIK**	(23) 28.12.96

MIDFIELDERS

11	Daniel **DE SILVA**	(22) 06.03.97
7	Milan **DURIC** (Ser)	(32) 03.10.87
4	**KIM** Eun-sun (SKo)	(31) 30.03.88
8	Michael **McGLINCHEY** (NZ)	(32) 07.01.87
22	Jacob **MELLING**	(24) 04.04.95
26	Josh **NISBET**	(20) 15.06.99
23	Mario **SHABOW**	(21) 05.05.98
17	Samuel **SILVERA**	(19) 25.10.00
18	Gianni **STENSNESS** (NZ)	(21) 07.02.99

FORWARDS

-	Chris **HAROLD**	(27) 14.07.92
29	**JAIR** (Bra)	(31) 10.06.88
14	Abraham **MAJOK**	(21) 13.10.98
9	Jordan **MURRAY**	(24) 02.10.95
10	Tommy **OAR**	(28) 10.12.91
25	John **ROBERTS**	(19) 20.01.01
30	Dylan **RUIZ-DIAZ**	(18) 12.03.01
19	Matt **SIMON**	(34) 22.01.86

HEAD COACH

Alen **STAJCIC**		(46) 02.11.73

MELBOURNE CITY

GOALKEEPERS

23	Dean **BOUZANIS**	(29) 02.10.90
46	Joe **GAUCI**	(19) 04.07.00
1	Tom **GLOVER**	(22) 24.12.97
42	Ahmad **TALEB**	(17) 04.12.02

DEFENDERS

4	Harrison **DELBRIDGE**	(27) 15.03.92
2	Scott **GALLOWAY**	(24) 25.04.95
22	Curtis **GOOD**	(26) 23.03.93
41	Mitchell **GRAHAM**	(18) 01.05.01
5	Jack **HENDRY** (Sco)	(24) 07.05.95
3	Scott **JAMIESON**	(31) 13.10.88
36	Kerrin **STOKES**	(17) 11.12.02
40	Richard **WINDBICHLER** (Aut)	(28) 02.04.91

MIDFIELDERS

51	Idrus **ABDULAHI**	(16) 22.09.03
13	Nathaniel **ATKINSON**	(20) 13.06.99
10	Florin **BERENGUER** (Fra)	(30) 01.04.89
6	Joshua **BRILLANTE**	(26) 25.03.93
17	Denis **GENREAU**	(20) 21.05.99
7	Rostyn **GRIFFITHS**	(31) 10.03.88
20	Adrian **LUNA** (Uru)	(27) 12.04.92
34	Connor **METCALFE**	(20) 05.11.99
21	Ramy **NAJJARINE**	(19) 23.04.00

FORWARDS

49	Stefan **COLAKOVSKI**	(19) 20.04.00
38	Yaya **DUKULY**	(17) 17.01.03
37	Gianluca **IANNUCCI**	(18) 18.06.01
9	Jamie **MACLAREN**	(26) 29.07.93
30	Moudi **NAJJAR**	(19) 26.06.00
11	Craig **NOONE** (Eng)	(32) 17.11.87
59	Bernardo **OLIVEIRA**	(15) 16.03.04
35	Raphael **RODRIGUES**	(16) 11.09.03
14	Markel **SUSAETA** (Spa)	(32) 14.12.87
19	Lachlan **WALES**	(22) 19.10.97

HEAD COACH

Erick **MOMBAERTS** (Fra)		(64) 21.04.55

MELBOURNE VICTORY

GOALKEEPERS

1	Matt **ACTON**	(27) 03.06.92
30	Matthew **SUTTON**	(19) 07.03.00
20	Lawrence **THOMAS**	(27) 09.05.92
50	Brendan **WHITE**	(27) 16.04.92

DEFENDERS

33	Aaron **ANDERSON**	(19) 25.09.00
34	Matthew **BOZINOVSKI**	(19) 05.01.01
19	Benjamin **CARRIGAN**	(21) 25.07.98
4	James **DONACHIE**	(26) 14.05.93
5	Tim **HOOGLAND** (Ger)	(24) 11.06.85
2	Storm **ROUX** (NZ)	(27) 13.01.93
21	Adama **TRAORE** (IvC)	(30) 03.02.90
31	Andrew **VISCIGLIO**	(19) 26.11.00

MIDFIELDERS

26	Jay **BARNETT**	(19) 14.02.01
18	Migjen **BASHA** (Alb)	(33) 05.01.87
6	Leigh **BROXHAM**	(31) 13.10.88
-	Giancarlo **GALLIFUOCO**	(26) 12.01.94
16	Joshua **HOPE**	(22) 07.01.98
17	Elvis **KAMSOBA** (Bur)	(23) 27.06.96
13	Birkan **KIRDAR**	(18) 07.02.02
25	Brandon **LAUTON**	(19) 03.03.00
24	Anthony **LESIOTIS**	(19) 24.04.00
8	Jakob **POULSEN** (Den)	(26) 07.07.83
23	Marco **ROJAS**	(28) 05.11.91

FORWARDS

7	Kenny **ATHIU** (SSu)	(27) 05.08.92
10	Robbie **KRUSE**	(31) 05.10.88
9	Andrew **NABBOUT**	(27) 17.12.92
32	Jack **PALAZZOLO**	(19) 29.04.00
35	Nuh **SEHAVDIC**	(19) 24.05.00
11	Ola **TOIVONEN** (Swe)	(33) 03.07.86

HEAD COACH

Carlos **SALVACHUA** (Spa)		(56) 30.04.73

NEWCASTLE JETS

GOALKEEPERS

30	Keegan **HUGHES**	(17) 17.07.02
20	Lewis **ITALIANO**	(29) 10.12.90
40	Noah **JAMES**	(19) 14.02.01
1	Glen **MOSS** (NZ)	(37) 19.01.83

DEFENDERS

4	Nigel **BOOGAARD**	(33) 14.08.86
2	Bobby **BURNS** (NI)	(20) 07.10.99
3	Jason **HOFFMAN**	(31) 28.01.89
22	Lachlan **JACKSON**	(24) 12.03.95
18	John **KOUTROUMBIS**	(21) 06.03.98
28	Patrick **LANGLOIS**	(20) 28.10.99
29	Connor **O'TOOLE**	(22) 04.07.97
44	Nikolai **TOPOR-STANLEY**	(34) 11.03.85

MIDFIELDERS

8	Wes **HOOLAHAN** (RoI)	(37) 20.05.82
5	Ben **KANTAROVSKI**	(28) 20.01.92
16	Matthew **MILLAR**	(23) 23.08.96
10	Dimitri **PETRATOS**	(27) 10.11.92
19	Kosta **PETRATOS**	(21) 01.03.98
23	Matthew **RIDENTON** (NZ)	(23) 11.03.96
25	Jack **SIMMONS**	(17) 04.04.02
32	Angus **THURGATE**	(20) 08.02.00
6	Steven **UGARKOVIC**	(25) 19.08.94

FORWARDS

9	Abdiel **ARROYO** (Pan)	(26) 13.12.93
11	Nick **FITZGERALD**	(28) 13.02.92
7	Roy **O'DONOVAN** (RoI)	(34) 10.08.85
31	Maki **PETRATOS**	(19) 11.09.00
14	Kaine **SHEPPARD** (Eng)	(26) 26.11.93

INTERIM HEAD COACH

Carl **ROBINSON** (Wal)		(43) 13.10.76

PERTH GLORY

GOALKEEPERS

-	Daniel **MARGUSH**	(22) 28.11.97
33	Liam **REDDY**	(38) 08.08.81
1	Tando **VELAPHI**	(32) 17.04.87

DEFENDERS

6	Dino **DJULBIC**	(37) 16.02.83
21	Tarek **ELRICH**	(33) 01.01.87
5	Ivan **FRANJIC**	(32) 10.09.87
2	Alex **GRANT**	(26) 23.01.94
23	Dane **INGHAM** (NZ)	(20) 08.06.99
8	James **MEREDITH**	(31) 05.04.88
16	Tomislav **MRCELA**	(19) 01.10.90
3	Jacob **TRATT**	(25) 14.09.94
31	Daniel **WALSH**	(17) 15.10.02
4	Gregory **WUTHRICH** (Swi)	(25) 04.12.94

MIDFIELDERS

20	Jake **BRIMMER**	(21) 03.04.98
17	Diego **CASTRO** (Spa)	(37) 02.07.82
19	Chris **IKONOMIDIS**	(24) 04.05.95
27	**JUANDE** (Spa)	(33) 12.06.86
88	Neil **KILKENNY**	(34) 19.12.85
12	**KIM** Soo-beom (SKo)	(19) 02.10.90
22	Vince **LIA**	(34) 18.03.85
13	Osama **MALIK**	(19) 30.09.90
-	Trent **OSTLER**	(17) 03.04.02
29	Kristian **POPOVIC**	(18) 14.08.01
26	Joshua **RAWLINS**	(15) 23.04.04

FORWARDS

25	Carlo **ARMIENTO**	(20) 04.06.99
7	Joel **CHIANESE**	(20) 15.02.90
18	Nicholas **D'AGOSTINO**	(21) 25.02.98
9	Bruno **FORNAROLI** (Uru)	(32) 07.09.87
28	Gabriel **POPOVIC**	(16) 28.07.03

HEAD COACH

Tony **POPOVIC**		(46) 04.07.73

SYDNEY FC

GOALKEEPERS

20	Tom **HEWARD-BELLE**	(22) 11.03.97
-	Adam **PAVLESIC**	(17) 30.07.02
1	Andrew **REDMAYNE**	(31) 13.01.89

DEFENDERS

2	Patrick **FLOTTMANN**	(22) 19.04.97
23	Rhyan **GRANT**	(28) 26.02.91
16	Joel **KING**	(19) 30.10.00
6	Ryan **McGOWAN**	(30) 15.08.89
21	Harry **VAN DER SAAG**	(20) 29.10.99
3	Ben **WARLAND**	(23) 04.09.96
4	Alex **WILKINSON**	(35) 13.08.84
7	Michael **ZULLO**	(31) 11.09.88

MIDFIELDERS

5	Alexander **BAUMJOHANN** (Ger)	(33) 23.01.87
26	Luke **BRATTAN**	(29) 08.03.90
17	Anthony **CACERES**	(27) 29.09.92
10	Milos **NINKOVIC** (Ser)	(35) 25.12.84
8	Paulo **RETRE**	(26) 04.03.93
19	Chris **ZUVELA**	(23) 21.01.97

FORWARDS

11	Kosta **BARBAROUSES** (NZ)	(30) 19.02.90
12	Trent **BUHAGIAR**	(21) 27.02.98
18	Luke **IVANOVIC**	(19) 06.06.00
9	Adam **LE FONDRE** (Eng)	(33) 02.12.86
27	Jordi **SWIBEL**	(20) 13.04.99
24	Marco **TILIO**	(18) 23.08.01

HEAD COACH

Steve **CORICA**		(46) 24.03.73

WELLINGTON PHOENIX (NZ)

GOALKEEPERS

1	Stefan **MARINOVIC**	(28) 07.10.91
20	Oliver **SAIL**	(24) 13.01.96

DEFENDERS

3	Luke **DEVERE** (Aus)	(30) 05.11.89
16	Louis **FENTON**	(26) 03.04.93
4	Te Atawhai **HUDSON-WIHONGI**	(24) 27.03.95
2	Liam **McGING** (Aus)	(21) 11.12.98
23	Walter **SCOTT** (Aus)	(20) 02.10.99
27	Steven **TAYLOR** (Eng)	(33) 23.01.86

MIDFIELDERS

13	Liberato **CACACE**	(19) 27.09.00
10	Ulises **DAVILA** (Mex)	(28) 13.04.91
8	Cameron **DEVLIN** (Aus)	(21) 06.06.98
17	Callan **ELLIOT**	(20) 07.07.99
6	Tim **PAYNE**	(26) 10.01.94
7	Reno **PISCOPO** (Aus)	(21) 27.05.98
14	Alex **RUFER**	(23) 12.06.96
5	Matti **STEINMANN** (Ger)	(25) 08.01.95
32	Sam **SUTTON**	(18) 10.12.01
12	Brandon **WILSON** (Aus)	(23) 28.01.97

FORWARDS

9	David **BALL** (Eng)	(30) 14.12.89
88	Gary **HOOPER** (Eng)	(32) 26.01.88
21	Callum **McCOWATT**	(20) 30.04.99
11	Jaushua **SOTIRIO** (Aus)	(24) 11.10.95
-	Oskar **VAN HATTUM**	(17) 14.04.02
31	Ben **WAINE**	(18) 11.06.01

HEAD COACH

Ufuk **TALAY**		(43) 26.03.76

WESTERN SYDNEY WANDERERS

GOALKEEPERS

-	Jack **GREENWOOD**	(20) 04.08.99
20	Vedran **JANJETOVIC**	(32) 20.08.87
1	Daniel **LOPAR** (Swi)	(34) 19.04.85
40	Nicholas **SUMAN**	(19) 28.02.00

DEFENDERS

-	Mohamed **AL TAAY**	(19) 15.06.00
16	Mathieu **CORDIER**	(20) 08.03.99
5	Daniel **GEORGIEVSKI** (NMa)	(32) 17.02.88
6	Matthew **JURMAN**	(30) 08.12.89
4	Dylan **McGOWAN**	(28) 06.08.91
13	Tass **MOURDOUKOUTAS**	(20) 03.03.99
31	Noah **PAGDEN**	(18) 20.03.01
33	Tate **RUSSELL**	(20) 24.08.99
29	Daniel **WILMERING**	(19) 19.12.00
34	Patrick **ZIEGLER** (Ger)	(30) 09.02.90

MIDFIELDERS

17	Keanu **BACCUS**	(21) 07.06.98
23	Kosta **GROZOS**	(19) 10.08.00
-	Radosław **MAJEWSKI** (Pol)	(33) 15.12.86
28	Fabian **MONGE**	(18) 12.07.01
9	Nicolai **MULLER** (Ger)	(32) 25.09.87
8	Jordan **O'DOHERTY**	(22) 14.10.97
-	Dean **PELEKANOS**	(19) 05.01.01
19	Pirmin **SCHWEGLER** (Swi)	(32) 09.03.87
22	Nick **SULLIVAN**	(21) 25.02.98

FORWARDS

35	Mohamed **ADAM**	(19) 05.08.00
-	Ali **AUGLAH**	(18) 11.02.02
10	Simon **COX** (RoI)	(32) 28.04.87
7	Mitchell **DUKE**	(29) 18.01.91
11	Bruce **KAMAU**	(24) 28.03.95
37	Jake **TREW**	(20) 13.09.99
27	Kwame **YEBOAH**	(25) 02.06.94

INTERIM HEAD COACH

Jean-Paul **DE MARIGNY**		(56) 21.01.64

WESTERN UNITED

GOALKEEPERS

20	James **DELIANOV**	(20) 20.10.99
1	Filip **KURTO** (Pol)	(28) 14.06.91
30	Ryan **SCOTT**	(24) 18.12.95

DEFENDERS

15	Jonathan **ASPROPOTAMITIS**	(23) 07.06.96
2	Aaron **CALVER**	(24) 12.01.96
28	Oskar **DILLON**	(21) 10.02.99
4	Andrew **DURANTE** (NZ)	(37) 03.05.82
3	Brendan **HAMILL**	(27) 18.09.92
-	Tomoki **IMAI** (Jap)	(29) 29.11.90
5	Dylan **PIERIAS**	(20) 20.02.00
19	Josh **RISDON**	(27) 27.07.92
22	Tomislav **USKOK**	(28) 22.06.91
13	Ivan **VUJICA**	(22) 20.04.97

MIDFIELDERS

14	Max **BURGESS**	(24) 16.01.95
17	Joshua **CAVALLO**	(20) 13.11.99
23	Alessandro **DIAMANTI** (Ita)	(36) 02.05.83
25	Luke **DUZEL**	(18) 05.02.02
24	Thiel **IRADUKUNDA**	(20) 12.07.99
12	Dario **JERTEC** (Cro)	(34) 05.09.85
8	Panagiotis **KONE** (Gre)	(32) 26.07.87
21	Sebastian **PASQUALI**	(20) 07.11.99
27	Jerry **SKOTADIS**	(19) 07.03.00

FORWARDS

26	Kwabena **APPIAH** (NZ)	(27) 19.05.92
18	Besart **BERISHA** (Kos)	(34) 29.07.85
11	Connor **PAIN**	(26) 11.11.93
9	Apostolos **STAMATELOPOULOS**	(20) 09.04.99
7	Valentino **YUEL**	(25) 12.10.94

HEAD COACH

Mark **RUDAN**		(44) 27.08.75

Down under...former West Ham United and Italy midfield ace Alessandro Diamanti is now with Western United

(ages as of 21.02.20)

Friendly...fans of Sociedad (in blue) and Athletic sit side-by-side at Bilbao's San Mames stadium

ATHLETIC BILBAO V REAL SOCIEDAD

Regional rivals with a common goal

The meeting between the two biggest clubs in the autonomous Basque Country in northern Spain is one of the world's friendliest derbies, with fans of both sides coming together to celebrate a shared sense of identity.

To this day Athletic maintain a policy of only fielding players from the region – and it has proved remarkably successful, with the club winning eight La Liga titles and being one of only three clubs, with Real Madrid and Barcelona, never to have been relegated.

For many years Sociedad, who have been league champions twice, followed the same practice, before abandoning the policy in 1989 with the signing of Republic of Ireland international John Aldridge from Liverpool.

Perhaps the most dramatic display of the clubs' heritage came in December 1976, just over a year on from the death of Spanish dictator Francisco Franco.

Leading their teams out at La Real's Anoeta Stadium, Inaxio Kortabarria of Sociedad and Athletic's Jose Angel Iribar carried both the banned Basque flag in an act of defiance. A month later the flag was legalised and could be flown for the first time since Franco's forces won the Spanish Civil War in 1939.

These days derby matches usually see supporters from both sides mixing freely and they have even staged singing and poetry competitions that embrace local traditions. WS

Race...Real's Adnan Januzaj takes on the Athletic defence

CLASSIC ENCOUNTERS

1909 Apr 4
In the first-ever meeting, and playing as Club Ciclista before changing their name nine months later, La Real beat Athletic 4-2 en route to winning the Copa del Rey.

1982 Apr 25
Real Sociedad beat Athletic Bilbao 2-1 on the last day of the season to finish two points ahead of Barcelona and retain the league title

1995 May 28
La Real win 5-0 with a hat-trick from Meho Kodro – whose son, Kenan, currently plays for Athletic.

2020 Feb 8
Athletic's Iker Muniain is sent off as Sociedad triumph 2-1 with an 83rd-minute winner from Swedish striker Alexander Isak.

ON BOTH SIDES

RAFAEL IRIONDO
● 1940-53; (coach) 1968-69, 1974-76
● 1953-55; (coach) 1972-74

JAVIER CLEMENTE
● 1968-1973; (coach) 1981-86, 1990-91, 2005-06
● (coach) 1999-2000

JAVIER IRURETA
● 1975-80; (coach) 1994-95
● (coach) 1995-97

BITTOR ALKIZA
● 1991-94, 2003-05
● 1994-2003

INIGO MARTINEZ
● 2011-18
● 2018-present

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